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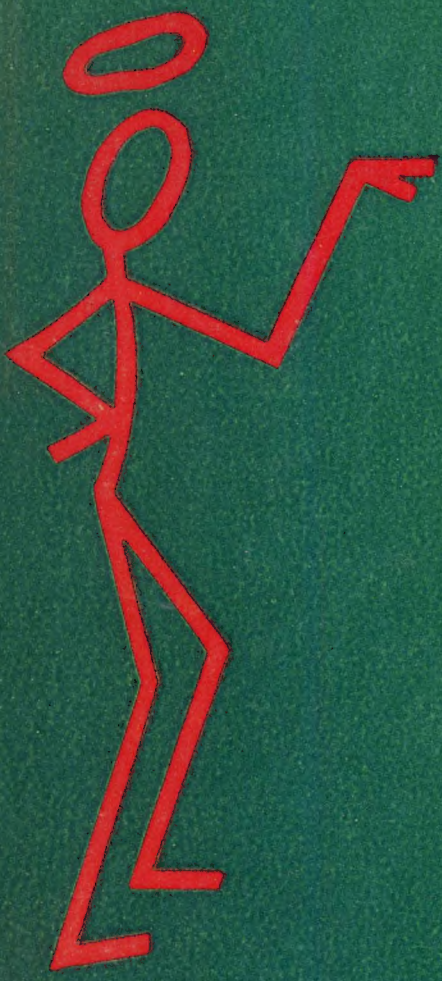
THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS



The Spanish Cow
by Leslie Charteris

Case of the Rival Familiars
by Clarence B. Kelland

The Magic of Fear
by Edgar Wallace

The Professor Had a Key
by Arthur Conan Doyle

A Wreath from the Sky
by Rufus King

The Doting Burglar
by Ben Hecht

LET ME KILL YOU SWEETHEART
A NEW NOVEL by OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

FOR the illustration of anyone who may still misguidedly try to dismiss us as "just another reprint magazine," it may be well to call attention once more to the slogan on our cover—*Some old, some new—the finest in mystery fiction.*

We consider our lead story this time, *Let Me Kill You Sweetheart,* such a major scoop that we have actually given it star billing—the first time in our long history of four issues that we have been modest enough to step down from the top spot in our own magazine. But a brand-new short novel by Octavus Roy Cohen is such a literary catch that it seems only fitting and proper to let my own (also brand-new) addition to the Saint Saga, *The Spanish Cow,* drop back into second place.

Also in the never-before department we have *A Murder of No Importance,* a novelet by Morris Cooper, an established pulp writer who is now deservedly on his way into glossier paper, and *Sweet Rolls and Murder* by William Campbell Gault, 1953 "Edgar" winner from the Mystery Writers of America.

On the other hand, we see no need to apologize for our reprints.

Twenty-five years ago, when my work was beginning to find its way into print, the Erle Stanley Gardner of his generation was an Englishman named Edgar Wallace. He created not just one famous character but at least a baker's dozen. Yet today (and this might be a sobering thought for all of us scriveners) hardly anyone seems to remember him. I still think the guy was great. And in *The Magic of Fear,* from one of the least known of his many series, I think you'll find ample reason to agree with me.

I'll bet that not one in ten thousand Irregulars knows that the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle ever wrote a mystery tale that wasn't about Sherlock Holmes. If you are one of the other 9,999 *The Professor Had a Key* will surprise you and might even win you a washing-machine on a quiz program some nippy autumn evening.

The Case of the Rival Familiars was the first of Clarence Budington Kelland's famous Alpin Stone stories. Did you miss it when it first came out? The chances are you did, unless you're older than you wish to admit. And when we can wind up a recital like this by mentioning in passing that we also have "other" stories by such writers as Ben Hecht, Rufus King, Cornell Woolrich and Hayden Howard, we think the competition in our table of contents is pretty keen.

That's our policy—old or new, but always stories you can't afford to miss.

Cleve Charlton

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the spanish cow

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Simon's success with women was a part of his way of life—but for once his talent cost him the game.

"PEOPLE," said Myra Campion languidly, "ought to have to pass an examination and get licensed before they're allowed to exhibit themselves on a bathing beach."

Simon Templar smiled vaguely and trickled sand through his fingers. Around them spread the sun-baked shambles of Juan les Pins—a remarkable display of anatomy in the raw. As far as the eye could see in either direction, men and women of all nationalities, ages, shapes, sizes and shades of color, stripped to the purely technical minimum of covering demanded by the liberal laws of France, littered themselves along the landscape and wooed the ultra-violet ray with a unanimous concentration of effort that would have restored world prosperity if it had been turned into the channels of banking or breeding pedigreed wombats or some such lucrative field of endeavor.

Reclining on straw mats, under beach umbrellas, in deck chairs or even on the well-worn sand itself, they sprawled along the margin of that fashionable stretch of water in a sizzling abandon of scorched flesh that would have made a hungry cannibal lick his lips. To the Saint's occasionally cynical eye there was something reminiscent of an orgy of human sacrifice in that welter of

MR. CHARTERIS' FABULOUS CHARACTER SPOTS A FORTUNE IN GEMS AT JUAN LES PINS IN THE NEWEST OF THIS NEW SAINT SERIES.

burnt-offerings on the altar of the snobbery of tan.

Sometimes Simon thought that a keen ear might have heard the old sun-god's homeric laughter at the childish sublimation that had repopulated his shrine, as the novices turned themselves like joints on a spit, basted their blistered skin with oils and creams and lay down to roast again, suffering patiently that they might triumph in the end.

Simon looked at teak-bronzed males with beautifully lubricated hair, parading themselves in magnificent disdain amongst the pink and peeling and furtively envious newcomers—and, being as brown as they were, only larger-minded, he was amused.

But not at that moment. At that moment he was interested exclusively in Mrs. Porphyria Mussber.

Mrs. Mussber, at that moment was methodically divesting herself of a set of boned pink corsets, preparatory to having her swim. The corsets were successfully removed under cover of her dress, defiantly rolled up and deposited in her canvas chair.

The dress followed—and Mrs. Mussber was revealed in a bright yellow bathing costume of nineteenth-century cut, which rose to the base of her neck and extended itself along her limbs almost to the knees and elbows. The completion of her undressing was hailed with irreverent applause from several parties in her neighborhood.

"I wonder," said Myra Campion languidly, making her observation more particular in all the arrogance of her own golden slenderness, "how that woman has the nerve to come here."

"Maybe it amuses her," suggested the Saint lazily with his blue eyes narrowed against the sun. "Why do fat men feel an urge to wear checked suits?"

His vagueness was rather an illusion. As a matter of fact he was quite pleasantly conscious of the slim blond grace of the girl beside him. But he had the gift of splitting his mind between two distinct occupations and one half of his mind had been revolving steadily around Mrs. Mussber and Mrs. Mussber's jewels for several days.

Of the late Mr. Mussber he knew little except that he had lived in Detroit and manufactured metal buttons for attachment to cheap overalls—and had in due course died, full of honor and indigestible food. Simon rather suspected that he had been a small man with a bald head and baggy trousers—but he admitted that this suspicion was based on nothing more substantial than the theory that women of Mrs. Mussber's size and demeanor are usually married to small men with bald heads and baggy trousers.

The point was purely academic anyway—it was now Porphyria Mussber who carried the burden of a reputedly fabulous fortune on her massive shoulders and whose well-padded physique, which in some respects did actually resemble that of a camel, should have been speculating anxiously about the size of the

needle's eye through which it might one day be called upon to pass.

Mrs. Mussber had arrived on the same day as the Saint himself—but she had since become far better known. She was popularly referred to by a variety of names, of which "The Queen of Sheba," "Cleopatra" and "The American Tragedy" were a fairly representative selection. But to Simon Templar she would always be the Spanish Cow.

From this it should not be hastily assumed that the Saint was unnecessarily vulgar. To those of cosmopolitan education, the Spanish Cow is an allusion hardly less classical than others that had been bestowed upon Porphyria.

The Spanish Cow—*la vache espagnol*—is, curiously enough, a creature of French mythology and is indignantly repudiated by Spain. It is the symbol of everything clumsy, inefficient and absurd. When a Frenchman wishes to say that he speaks English excessively badly he will tell you that he speaks *comme une vache espagnol*—like a Spanish Cow.

In the same simile he may dance, play bridge, butt into a petting party or remember that he owes you a few thousand francs. For the benefit of those in search of higher education it might be explained that this does not stem from any ancient national antagonism or occult anthropomorphic legend.

It is, etymologically, a corruption of *Basque espagnol,* and originated in the belief of French purists that the Basques speak the language atrociously. But this is not the place to enter that argument. To Simon, the name fitted Mrs. Mussber like a glove, with a pleasing ambivalence that included her swarthy complexion and distinctly bovine build.

She waddled on towards the water's edge through a cloud of giggles, grins and whispered comments that were pitched just loud enough to reach her ears. And Simon kicked his toes through the sand and gazed after her thoughtfully. The daily baiting of the Spanish Cow had lost most of its novelty as a spectacle, for him—though the rest of the beach showed no signs of tiring of it.

It already rivaled water-skiing among the sports of that season. It had the priceless advantage of costing nothing and of giving a satisfactory reaction to the most awkward tyro. Goaded far enough Mrs. Mussber could always be relied upon to give a return demonstration which dissolved the onlookers into shrieks of laughter. It happened according to plan that morning.

As Mrs. Mussber tested the temperature of the water with her toes the Adonis of the beach came swaggering along the rim of wet sand, rippling his rounded muscles—Maurice Walmar, heir to millions and one of the oldest titles in the *Almanac de Gotha,* a privileged person at any time and the most daring leader of the new sport. His dark sensual eyes took in the situation at once and a smile touched his lips. He fell on his knees and bowed his

head to the ground in an elaborate mockery of homage.

Mrs. Mussber put out her tongue at him. The beach howled with delight.

"She must be screwy," opined Myra Campion, fascinated.

The opinion was pretty generally held. Properly provoked Mrs. Mussber could be depended on to pull the most horrible faces at her tormentors, squawk abuse at them like a trained parrot and even put her fingers to her nose. Far from bringing forbearance this apparent screwiness seemed to fan a spark of pure sadism in the onlookers—the same savage instinct that impels urchins to throw stones at an idiot village boy.

"Have you seen that caricature of her outside the Fregate?" asked Miss Campion. "The boy who draws portraits on the beach did it. It's too perfect. She tried to make them take it down and they said she could have it if she bought it. They told her she could have it for fifty thousand francs but it's still there. In a frame, hanging up in the entrance."

"I'll have to take a look at it," said the Saint. He stood up, dusting the sand from his legs. "Do you think you could get around that buoy again before lunch? We might work up an appetite."

As he slid easily through the cool smooth water he looked back and saw the bright yellow bathing cap of the Spanish Cow bobbing in the sunlight close to the shore as she paddled about with her clumsy breast stroke. He pillowed his face in the blue sea and drifted on with a sweep of long effortless arms, gazing down through the crystalline transparency to the misty depths where tiny fish flicked and turned like silver sparks, and decided that the time was ripe for Mrs. Mussmer and her jewels to meet Romance.

It all began the day after Simon arrived at Juan les Pins. He was sitting on a high stool in a sandwich bar, refreshing his interior with a glass of Dry Sack, when the Spanish Cow came in. Simon did not then know her real name, nor had he become sufficiently interested to christen her but, observing that she wore voluminous beach pyjamas with broad horizontal stripes of purple and yellow which made her look like a great blowsy wasp, it is probable that some of the emotion he felt might have been detected by an eagle eye.

The Saint's sense of humor was very human—and the barman looked at him and grinned sympathetically, as one who in his day also had been confronted by the spectacle for the first time. It is therefore possible that the Saint's face was not quite so woodenly disciplined as a meticulous politeness might have wished.

It is possible that one of his eyebrows may have twitched involuntarily or the corners of his mouth widened a slight half-millimetre in answer to the barman's confidence. And then he glanced at the vision again and saw that it was staring at him through a pair of lorgnettes and

pulling atrocious grimaces at him.

The Saint blinked. He regarded his Dry Sack suspiciously. To a man of his habits it was a remarkable hallucination to affront the brain at eleven o'clock in the morning—even a morning of such potent sunshine as those shores boast in July.

He looked again. Mrs. Mussber put out her tongue in a grimace of bloodcurdling menace.

Simon swayed slightly on his stool. His friends had frequently told him that he was quite mad but he had never expected to lose his last vestige of sanity in quite so disturbing a way. He turned uneasily to an inspection of the other patrons of the bar, wondering if the portly Dutchman on his left would suddenly seem to be elongating and turning bright green or if the charming honey-blond damsel on his right would be pulling off her pink ears and stirring them into her coffee.

Instead he found the other customers still of normal shape and hue, smiling broadly. He braced himself to look at the striped vision again. It applied its thumb to its nose and extended its fingers towards him, waggling them with hideous glee.

The charming damsel on his right spoke through the daze of alarm that was rapidly enveloping him. "Don't pay any attention to her," she said. "She's always like that."

"Bless you, darling," murmured the Saint fervently. "For a moment I thought the heat had got me."

"Who's always like what?" screamed Mrs. Mussber.

The charming damsel sipped her coffee. "We're off," she remarked.

"I can pull faces just as well as you can," yelled Mrs. Mussber, with justifiable pride—and the little imps of Satan elected that instant to enter into the Saint.

He turned. "Madam," he said generously, "you can pull them better."

Simon had never spoken boastfully of the encounter. He was ordinarily a very chivalrous bloke, kind to the fat and infirm and willing to oblige a lady in any manner that was in his power. But there were moments when he ceased to be a truly responsible captain of his soul and this was one of them.

The result was that three minutes later he found himself strolling back to the beach with the charming damsel on his arm and a delirious bar behind him. Few people had ever been known to score off the Saint in an exchange of backchat and Mrs. Mussber was certainly not one of them. It was that same night in the Casino that he saw Mrs. Mussber plastered with all her jewels, and the modest glow of those three minutes of light-headed revelry abruptly vanished.

Which explained his abstracted thoughtfulness on this subsequent morning.

For it was a principle of the Saint's sparsely principled career that one never exchanged entirely carefree badinage with anyone so liberally adorned with diamonds as Mrs. Porphyria Mussber. On the

contrary one tended to be patient—almost long-suffering.

Following the example of the sun-worshippers simmering in their grease, one stewed to conquer. Diamonds so large and plentiful could not be gazed upon at any time by any honest filibuster without sentiment. And when they chanced to be hung around a woman who pulled faces and shouted wrathfully across bars it became almost a sacred duty to give that sentiment full rein.

Unfortunately Simon saw the grimaces first and the jewelry afterwards—and he had spent some days regretting that chance order of events, the more earnestly when he discovered that Myra Campion had helped to spread the fame of his achievement and that he was widely expected to repeat the performance every time he and Mrs. Mussber passed close enough to speak.

He hoped speechlessly that the call of Romance, which he had at last decided was the only possible approach, might be strong enough to obliterate the memory of that earlier argument. The Spanish Cow had no friends—he had had some difficulty in learning her official name, which no one had apparently troubled to inquire.

From local gossip he learned that she had once had a gigolo, a noisome biped with tinted fingernails and a lisp. But even that specimen had found the penalties of his job too high and had minced on to pastures less conspicuous.

It seemed as if a cavalier with stamina to last the course might get near enough to those lavish ropes of gems to pay his expenses. And having reached that decision Simon made up his mind to go ahead with it before his nerve failed.

He had his chance at the Casino that evening. Miss Campion was safely settled at the *boule* table with a pile of chips, and the Saint looked around and saw Mrs. Mussber emerging majestically from the baccarat room and proceeding towards a table in the lounge. Simon drew a deep breath, straightened his tie, and sauntered after her.

She stared at him belligerently. "What do you want?"

"I think I owe you an apology," said the Saint quietly.

"You've found that out, have you?" she barked.

A smirking waiter was dusting off the table. Simon sat down opposite her and ordered a *fine a l'eau*. Parties at adjoining tables were already glancing curiously and expectantly towards them and the movement cost Simon a clammier effort than anything he had done for a long time.

"That morning—a few days ago," he explained contritely. "You misunderstood me. I wasn't being fresh. But when you called me down I sort of forgot myself."

"I should think you did," rasped Mrs. Mussber without friendliness.

"I'm sorry."

"So you ought to be."

It dawned on the Saint that this vein of dialogue could be continued

almost indefinitely if Mrs. Mussber insisted on it. He looked around somewhat tensely for inspiration, wondering if after all the jewels could be worth the price; and by the mercy of his guardian angel the inspiration was provided.

It was provided in the person of Maurice Walmar, who at that moment came strolling superbly across the lounge and recognized an acquaintance in the far corner. With an elegant wave of his hand he started in that direction.

His route took him past the table where Simon was prayerfully groping for the light. Walmar recognized the Spanish Cow and flashed a meaning sneer towards his acquaintance. When he squeezed past the table he deliberately swerved against Mrs. Mussber's arm as she raised her glass. The drink spilled heavily across her lap.

"Pardon," said Walmar casually and went on.

Simon leapt up.

Even if he had not been interested in Mrs. Mussber's jewels he would probably have done the same thing. He had witnessed every phase of the incident and at any time he would have called it carrying a joke too far. Nor did he care much for Maurice Walmar, with his too beautifully modeled face and platinum watch bracelet. He caught the young humorist by the elbow and spun him around.

"I don't think you saw what you did," he remarked evenly.

For a second the other was startled to incredulity. Then he glanced down at the soaked ruin of Mrs. Mussber's gown, and back from that to the Saint. His aristocratic lips curled in their most polished insolence.

"I have apologized," he said carelessly. "It was an accident."

"Then so is this," said the Saint mildly and his fist shot over and slammed crisply into the center of the sneering mouth.

Walmar rocked on his heels. He clutched at a table and went down in a spatter of glass and splashing fluids.

There was an instant's deathly stillness—and then a gray-haired Englishman observed quietly, "He asked for it."

Walmar crawled up shakily. His mouth was a mess and there was blood on his silk shirt. A covey of waiters awoke from their momentary stupor and buzzed in among the tables, interposing themselves between a resumption of the strife. The players abandoned the *boule* table and swarmed out towards the prospect of more primitive sport, leaving the high priest to intone his forlorn, *"Rien ne va plus"* to a skeleton congregation.

The two inevitable policemen, who appear as if at the rubbing of a kind of Aladdin's lamp on the scene of any French fracas, stalked ponderously into the perspective, closely followed by an agitated manager. The tableau had all the makings of a second-act musical comedy curtain but Simon overcame the temptation to explore all the avenues of extravagant burlesque which

it opened up. He spoke calmly and to the point.

"He upset this lady's drink—purposely."

Walmar, struggling dramatically in the grasp of a waiter whom he could have shaken off with a wave of his hand, shouted, *"Messieurs!* It was an accident. He attacked me without provocation."

The larger *agent* turned to the waiter. *"Qu'est-ce qui est arrive?"* he demanded.

"Je n'ai rien vu," answered the man tactfully.

It was the gray-haired Englishman who came forward with quiet corroboration and the affair turned into a general soothing-party for Maurice Walmar, whose wealth and family entitled him to eccentricities that would rapidly have landed an ordinary visitor in jail. The jaundiced eye with which private battles are viewed in France was well known to the Saint and he was rather relieved to be spared the unheroic sequels in which offenders against the code of peace are usually involved.

He went out on to the terrace with Mrs. Mussber and as he left the lounge he caught sight of Myra Campion's face among the spectators who were staring after him in the pained blank manner of a row of dowagers who have been simultaneously bitten in the fleshy part of the leg by their favorite Pomeranians.

Miss Campion's sweet symmetrical features were almost egg-like in their stupefied bewilderment—and Simon's smile as he reached the edge of the balcony and looked out over the dark sea came quite naturally.

"You've seen for yourself," he said. "I've just got a natural gift for getting into trouble."

"Served him right," blared Mrs. Mussber. "The dirty little—"

Her comment on Maurice Walmar's lineage was certainly inaccurate but Simon could understand her feelings.

The orchestra wailed into another erotic symphony, and the Saint expanded his chest and flicked his cigarette over the parapet. The job had to be completed.

"Would you like to dance?" he asked.

The Spanish Cow gazed at him suspiciously, her small eyes hard and bright in the sallow puffy face. Then, without answering, she marched towards the floor.

As they completed their first circle under the fairy lights, Simon saw that the colony was following his movements with bulging eyes. It went into small huddles and buzzed as openly as convention would permit. He began to find more innocent entertainment in his sudden notoriety than he had ever expected —and the Saint had never found the appalled reactions of respectable society dull.

There were times when he derived a purely urchin satisfaction from the flouting of the self-appointed Best People, and he was quite disappointed when the Spanish Cow broke away from him after a half-dozen turns.

"I can't stay here with my dress soaking," she said abruptly. "Take me home."

Simon walked back with her to the Provencal. The sky was a blaze of star-dust, and a whisper of music came from the Casino terrace. Down by the water there were tiny ripples hissing and chattering on the firm sand, and a light breeze murmured in the fronds of the tall palms. Simon had a fleeting remembrance of the slim exquisite softness of Myra Campion—and being very human he sighed inaudibly. But business was business.

A few yards from the hotel entrance Mrs. Mussber stopped. Her ropes of diamonds flashed in the light of the rows of bulbs flaming the marquee over the doors.

"Thank you for helping me," she said with a harsh effort.

Simon's teeth flashed. He knew that she was taking stock of his tanned keen-lined face, the set of his wide shoulders and the length of lean muscular limbs. He knew he was interesting to look at—conquering a natural bashfulness that he always kept well under control, he admitted the fact frankly.

"Not at all," he said.

She opened her bag and held something out to him. He took it and unfolded it—it was a ten-thousand-franc note. He folded it again carefully, and handed it back with a smile.

"I'm afraid you're mistaken," he said pleasantly. "You don't owe me anything. Good night."

There began for Mrs. Porphyria Mussber an interlude of peace that must have been strange to her. The glances she encountered veiled their derision with perplexed uncertainty—the giggles when she unharnessed herself of her corsets before going in to bathe were more subdued. The impulse to weep with helpless mirth whenever she appeared was still there, human nature being what it has ever been.

But the story of the Casino episode had flown around the town and cast a damp sheet over the pristine hilarity of the jest. There was the sight of Maurice Walmar's bruised and swollen mouth for reinforcement—and the other aspiring wits looked at it and at the Saint's leathery torso and merged themselves thoughtfully into the background.

Even the waiters, who had been encouraged to curry favor with the sportive element by smirking and winking at the audience whenever they were called upon to serve the woman, relapsed into the supercilious impersonality with which waiters in fashionable resorts cloak their yearning for tumbrils and guillotines.

Myra Campion cornered the Saint the very next afternoon. He was paddling contentedly along in the general direction of Gibraltar, feeling himself safely insulated from the seethe of popular speculation by the half-mile of limpid water that separated him from the shore, when his head encountered a firm but yielding obstruction. He rolled

over and looked into the wet face of Miss Campion.

"You'll have to swim farther out than this if you want to dodge me," she said.

Destiny having overtaken him, Simon reflected philosophically that it could have chosen many less agreeable vehicles.

"Darling," he said blandly, "I've been searching the whole ocean for you."

She trod water, the slow swell lifting her small brown face against the intense sky, her eyes fixed on him inexorably. "What was the idea —lashing out at Maurice like that?"

"Did you see what he did?"

"I heard about it. But you didn't have to paste him that way."

"I just slapped him," said the Saint calmly. "Isn't he on the beach today? Well, if I'd really pasted him he'd 've spent the next six weeks in a hospital—getting his face remodeled." The Saint steered himself neatly around a drifting jellyfish seeking its mate. "My dear, if you're really upset about my slapping a conceited daffodil like Walmar for carrying a joke to those lengths, you haven't the good taste I thought you had."

There was a certain chilliness about their parting that the Saint realized was unavoidable. He swam back alone, floating leisurely through the buoyant sea and meditating as he went. He knew well enough that a set of diamonds like those displayed by Mrs. Porphyria Mussber are rarely obtained without some kind of inconvenience—but such incidental troubles were merely a part of the most enchanting game in the world.

Back on the sands he stretched himself out beside Mrs. Mussber's chair and chatted with no more than ordinary politeness. On the following morning he did the same thing. There was no hint of a pressing advance about it—it was simply the way in which any normal holiday acquaintance would have been expected to behave.

But the Spanish Cow's soured belligerence had lost its sting. Sometimes she looked at him curiously, with the habitual suspicion hesitating in the background of her beady eyes, as if the impact of a more common courtesy was still too strange to be taken at its face value.

That evening he walked with her along the beach. It was well into cocktail time and the young brown bodies had taken themselves off the sands to refresh themselves at the Casino or the Perroquet or to dance before dinner at Maxim's. The last survivor was a shabby mahogany-tanned old man with a rake, engaged in his daily task of scratching the harvest of cigarette-ends and scraps of paper and orange peels out of the sand to leave it smooth and clean for the morrow's sacrifice—a sad and apocryphal figure on the deserted shore.

They went by the almost empty Fregate—and Simon recalled the caricature in the entrance. It was still there—a brutal sadistically accurate burlesque. Mrs. Mussber

stared fixedly ahead, as if she had forgotten it. But he knew that she had not.

The Saint stepped aside. A lounging waiter realized what was happening too late and started forward with an outraged yap—but the picture was out of the frame and shredded into small fragments by that time.

Simon held them out.

"Do these belong to you?" he inquired gently. And the man looked up and found the Saint's blue eyes fastened levely upon him, as hard and wintry as frosted sapphires. The eyes were quite calm, utterly devoid of open menace—but there was something in them that choked his instinctive retort in his throat. Something in the eyes and the tuned softness of the voice that spoke past them.

He shook his head mutely, astounded at his own silence—and the Saint smiled genially and dropped the torn relics at his feet.

On the front of the Casino there were banners and posters proclaiming the regular weekly gala. "Are you going?" asked Simon casually.

The bright defensive eyes switched to him sidelong. "Are you?"

"I hadn't thought about it."

They walked a few steps; and then she said sharply, "Would you come with me?"

Simon did not hesitate for an instant. "I'd love to," he said easily—and she said nothing more until he left her at the Provencal.

Before climbing into white shirt and tuxedo the Saint packed a bag. He was traveling very light—but he still preferred not to leave his preparations for a getaway to the last minute. And he had decided that the getaway should take place that night. He did not want to delay it any longer. He was a little tired of Juan les Pins—and, even in that brief time, more than a little tired of the part he had to play.

But when he collected Mrs. Mussber again there was no hint of that in his manner. Her dyed hair had been freshly waved into desperate undulations and the powder was crusted thickly on her face and arms. Her hands and neck were a blaze of precious stones.

He saw her hard painted lips smile for the first time. "You are very kind," she said, as they walked down to the Casino.

The Saint shook his head. "This gala business is a wonderful racket," he murmured lightly. "The same place, the same food, the same music, the same floor show—but they charge you double and let out a few colored balloons and everyone thinks they're having a gay time."

As a matter of strict fact it went a little further than colored balloons. Simon, who had attended these events before, had expected it and balanced the factor into his plans. There were rag dolls, for instance—those long-legged sophisticated puppets with which some women love to clutter up their most comfortable chairs.

Simon was also able to add a large bouquet of flowers, an enor-

mous box of chocolates and three of the aforesaid colored balloons to the bag. When at last he escorted a supremely contented Mrs. Mussber home he looked rather like an amateur Santa Claus.

Therefore he had a sound excuse for going into the hotel with her —and when she asked for her key at the desk he deftly added that also to his burden.

"You don't want to lug all this stuff upstairs," he said. "Let me take them for you."

She was studying his face again with watchful half-suspicious wonderment as they rode up in the elevator. The elevator boy thought his own cynical thoughts—and under cover of the trophies with which he was laden the Saint pressed Mrs. Mussber's key carefully into a plaque of soft wax and wrapped the wax delicately in his handkerchief before he put it away.

He went just inside the sitting-room of her suite and decanted the souvenirs onto a side table.

"Won't you have a drink?" she asked.

"Thanks," said the Saint, "but I think it's past my bedtime."

She must have been pretty once, it occurred to him as she put down her bag with unaccustomed hesitancy. Pretty in a flashy common way that had turned only too easily into the obese overblown frowsiness that amused Walmar and his satellites so much.

She held out her hand. "Thank you so much," she said with a queer simplicity that had to struggle through the brassy roughness of her voice.

He went back to his own hotel with the memory of that parting in his mind.

She was the Spanish Cow. So he had christened her and so she would always be. A fat repulsive noisy quarrelsome imbecilic vulgarian—with a two-hundred-thousand-dollar collection of jewels. And it was a part of his career to take those jewels away and apply them to a better use than encircling her billowy neck.

To make that possible he had had to play her like a fish on a line—and it had so happened that the fish had taken the line for a lifeline. It had ceased fighting—had brought itself to a wild grotesque travesty of coyness. When it discovered how it had been hoodwinked it would fight again—but with other anglers. It would be bitter, coarse, obstreperous again, pulling faces and putting out its tongue. And that also was in the game.

In his room he took a small case of instruments from a drawer and selected a key blank that matched the impression on his wax plaque. It took him a full hour and a half to file a duplicate to his rigorous satisfaction—and then he changed his clothes and picked up an ordinary crook-handle walking stick and went out again.

It was late enough for him to have the road to himself and no inquisitive eye observed the course he steered for the fire escape of the

Provencal. With the calm dexterity of a seasoned Londoner boarding a passing bus he edged the crook of his stick over the lowest platform and swung himself nimbly up.

Then he flitted up the iron zigzag like a ghost on rubber-soled shoes. The lights were on behind the curtains of a room on the second floor and a passionate declaration of eternal love wafted out into the balmy night as he went by. The Saint smiled faintly to himself and ascended to the third floor. The nearest window there was dark.

He slid over the sill with no more noise than a ray of moonlight, and crossed as silently to the door. In another moment he was outside, the latch jammed back with a wedge of cardboard so that he could make his retreat by the same route, the corridor stretching out before him like a broad highway to his Eldorado.

The key he had made fitted soundlessly into the lock of Mrs. Mussber's suite and he turned it without a scrape or a click and let himself into the sitting-room. He had closed the door again from the inside before he saw a thin strip of luminance splitting the darkness on his right, where the communicating door of the bedroom was—and he realized, with a sudden settling of all his faculties into a taut-strung vigilance, that for some unaccountable reason the Spanish Cow had not yet sought the byre.

The Saint rested where he was, while he considered the diverse aspects of his misfortune. And then, with the effortless silence of a cat, he glided on towards the bedroom door.

It was at that moment that he heard the incredible noise.

For a couple of seconds he thought that after all he must have been mistaken—that Mrs. Mussber had gone to sleep, leaving the light on as a protection against banshees and things that go *bomp* in the night, and was snoring with all the rich bulgelike power of which her metallic nasal cavities should have been capable.

Then, as the cadence dropped and he made out a half-dozen words, he considered whether she might be giving tongue in her sleep. And then, as the sound continued the truth dawned upon him with an eerie shock.

Porphyria Mussber was singing.

Simon tiptoed to the crack through which the light came. If there had been lions in the way he could not have stopped himself. More words came out to him and the semblance of a melody that twisted the first tentacles of a slow and awful understanding into his brain.

She was sitting on the stool in front of her dressing-table, gazing into the mirror with her hands spread out inertly before her. The song was one of those things that the band had played that night—a song like all the others, a sentimental dirge to a flimsy tune, with a rhythm that was good to dance to and a refrain that was true

enough for the theme song of a summer night's illusion. But to Mrs. Mussber it might have been the Song of Songs. A weird cold breath fanned the Saint's spine as it came to him that perhaps it was.

She was singing it with a terrible quiet passion, gazing at the reflected image of her own face as if in the singing she saw herself again as she had been when a man desired her. She sang it as if it carried her back to the young years, when it had not been so strange for a handsome cavalier to dance with her without a fee, before time mocked those things into the unthinkable depths of loneliness.

Her jewels were heaped in a reluctant pile in front of her. For the first time Simon began to understand them—and he felt that he knew why other women wore them at her age. "I once was beautiful," they spoke for her in their pitiful proud defiance. "I once was young and desired. These stones were given to me because I was beautiful and a man loved me. Here is your proof."

But she could not have seen them while she sang. She could not have seen anything but the warm clear flesh on which that creased and painted mask of a face had built itself in the working out of life, to be jeered at and caricatured.

She could not have seen anything but the years that go by and leave nothing behind but remembrance. She sang in a cracked tuneless voice because that night the remembrance had come back—because, for a day and a night, a man had been kind. And there were tears in her eyes.

The Saint smoked his cigarette. And in a little while he went quietly away, as he had come, and walked home empty-handed under the star-studded Riviera sky.

In full flight from the horrendous Mrs. Mussber, our Brighter Buccaneer hastens to put an ocean between himself and Juan les Pins, only to find himself enmeshed in a totally different type of intrigue shortly after his arrival in the city of the Aztecs.

For in a Mexico City cafe Simon Templar finds himself a guest at dinner with Police Captain Xavier, who suggests delicately that it might be well worth Saintly trouble to eliminate the Brothers Enriquez, a pair of potential revolutionists so rich and so powerful that they are far beyond any official control.

Fifty thousand rifles, five thousand machine-guns, a six-figure bundle of boodle and perhaps the deadliest blonde even a Saint ever met, combine to make THE REVOLUTION RACKET a great Saint story—in our next issue.

let me kill you sweetheart

by . . . Octavus Roy Cohen

Marriage to a faithless woman can be a major headache. But having her murdered can be even worse.

THE DARK BLUE SEDAN was moving toward Hollywood at high speed. Save for the young man at the wheel and the girl at his side there was no one in the car. No one, that is, except the wife of the young man—and she didn't count, really, because she was dead.

Clyde Graham and his passenger were concentrating on the road which unwound beneath their wheels. They were thinking fast and talking little.

They were nice normal folks. This was their first experience with murder and they were frightened. Especially Kay Lambert was afraid, because ever since they had discovered the body huddled in the back of the sedan she'd had nothing to do except to think, whereas her companion had found some outlet for his tension in fast driving. She wished she were at the wheel.

From time to time Kay glanced at him. She saw a young man thirty years of age with brown hair and eyes and a profile which she found definitely interesting in a strictly masculine way. He was rugged rather than handsome. His features were strong and if they lacked classic lines that was due in large part to his too-enthusiastic participation in

Increasingly during the past four decades the appearance of a new story by Octavus Roy Cohen has become a literary event. Beginning with creation of the immortal Florian Slappy, Mr. Cohen has created unforgettable characters in an ever-widening set of environments, has steadily improved and developed a talent that seemed thoroughly burnished when it first appeared. This, his newest, may well be his most human story. Certainly it must rate among the most exciting in a long line of mystery melodramas.

certain sports such as football and boxing.

He wasn't a reticent person but he wasn't voluble either. There was a degree of shyness about him which those who knew him less well regarded as aloofness. He was a young man who had worked hard, who had accomplished much and who wasn't in the habit of talking about it. He sat hunched slightly forward as though seeing far beyond the next curve in the road—far beyond and into the trouble which lay ahead.

Kay had never before seen Clyde under stress of great emotion. Of course that didn't count the time when he'd told her that he was in love with her and that his marriage was headed for the rocks. Then he had merely been a young man in love and had been demonstratively affectionate when she had said Yes.

But that was emotion of a different sort—an emotion considerably less grim. It had been an emotion founded on happiness and hope and it had brought out in him a lightness and boyishness which caused her to marvel how he could possibly be a very serious—and very successful—young research engineer. There had been an urgency in his lovemaking, a sort of desperate quality, as though he had been hit hard by the floundering of his matrimonial bark.

And just as she had seen him in a light which was not meant for the rest of the world, his view of her had been different too. To others she was merely Kay Lambert, an attractive young lady of 26, who had been thrown into a business career and had made a rather spectacular go of it ever since.

Her casual friends saw a girl who had a figure which was unmistakably feminine, whose hair was so dark a brown as to be almost black, who was four inches better than five feet in height and who weighed 118 pounds. They saw her as a meticulous dresser whose clothes were never as expensive as they seemed to be, who had laughter in her eyes, yet who seldom let herself be swept away by it.

They said she was "nice," they said she was "competent." And when they described her with the word "competent" they meant merely that she had succeeded in a business where many men had failed—that she had inherited a fine automobile agency and had built it into an even finer one.

Kay Lambert was two persons. During working hours she was calm, efficient, a hard worker. She did not make the mistake of affecting too-severe garments but neither did she trade on the fact that she was a woman. She did what she had to do and did it without ostentation. Her employees swore by her. They said, "A guy works for Lambert, he gets a fair shake every time."

That was the way she wanted it. After hours she could be a woman to her heart's content. She could use makeup the way she liked it and the perfume she preferred. She could wear frilly clothes, she could enjoy being helped into cars by the man

she was with and having doors held open for her.

But as the Lambert of Lambert Motors she had a different set of rules. She refused to make capital of the fact that she was an extraordinarily attractive young woman but she also refused to regard her femininity as a handicap. The result was that many of her acquaintances regarded her as what they called a "career girl," which meant they didn't think she had very much warmth. They would have been surprised had they known what Clyde Graham had discovered the first time he swept her into his arms.

Actually he had been a trifle surprised too—and most definitely pleased. He had known he was in love with her, he considered her beautiful—but he hadn't known until that moment that her mother must have been frightened by a volcano. "All this," he murmured unsteadily as he released her and held her at arm's length: "All this and a blast furnace too?"

She said, boldly and shyly, "You're pretty good at stoking the fires, Clyde."

So for each other they had personalities which their friends did not suspect. Together they could be —and were on slightest provocation —as silly as love allows. For a long time they had been in love with each other and during the past six months they had waited with admitted impatience for the one-year interlocutory period to pass. It hadn't been easy, this waiting for Clyde's legal freedom—but it had been fun.

Now he was free. He was free months before the time set by the Courts. He was free because some one had shot his wife twice through the heart, because her dead body rode with them through the California night.

Clyde took one hand off the wheel and reached into the pocket of his coat. He drew forth an incredibly thin very lovely gold cigarette case on which were Kay's initials K. L. He said, "Better put this in your bag, sweetheart."

She took it from him and sat staring down at it. "Is that being smart?" she asked.

"I think so. We'll be talking to the police soon. If we told them that it was on our table when Zelda joined us and that she took it as a spite gesture—and that we didn't see it again until we found it on her body in the car—they might not believe us."

She asked, "Why did the cigarette case annoy her so?"

"Because she always wanted me to give her one—an expensive one. When she saw this she knew I'd given it to you. That made her angry."

"You mean you're not going to mention it to the police?"

"No—it has no bearing on Zelda's death. Telling the police about it wouldn't do any good and it might do a lot of harm. We're both in too deep as it is." He smiled at her. It wasn't much of a smile but it was the best he could do under the cir-

cumstances. "Play it my way, won't you, dear?"

She tucked the gold cigarette case away in her bag. She said, "That's what I've always done, isn't it, Clyde?"

"I also want you to do something else—stop being frightened."

A lump came up in her throat. She said, "I can't change the way I feel inside."

"What are you afraid of?"

"Everything. The circumstances, the inevitable publicity, the gossip, the questioning . . ." She edged closer to him, and tried to steady her voice. "Hadn't you better slow down, Clyde? Things would be even worse than they are now if you piled the car up."

"I'm not . . ." he started to protest, then glanced at the speedometer. The needle was hanging at seventy. He released some of the pressure on the accelerator. "You're right, honey, as usual." He looked straight ahead at the black walls of the canyon. "I love you so damn much."

She put one hand over his. He could feel the texture of her gray kidskin coat against his shoulder. She said, "I love you more than that, Clyde."

It was she who first saw the car which had been lurking at the side of the road. She saw its headlights blaze as they shot past, saw it swing in after them.

She was right. Radio car 62 came up fast. Clyde pulled over to the side of the road and stopped. The police car came to a halt just a few inches back of the left rear wheel. Officer Sandifer stepped out on the left and his partner—Kenmore—came up from the right. Both carried flashlights and each had loosened his gun, just in case. They were both in uniform—both alert and wary. All four headlights were still on so that the canyon was illuminated by four sharp but inadequate pencils of light.

As the officers approached, Clyde tried to think how he'd open the conversation, how he'd go about telling them that the dead body of his wife was in the back of the car. It was going to be awkward at best.

Officer Sandifer came close and said, "Travelin' kinda fast, ain't you, Bud?"

"I suppose so. I—" But that was as far as Clyde Graham got.

It was the voice of Officer Kenmore who broke in on them. Kenmore had come up on the other side of the car. His flash had picked out the tense features of Kay Lambert. Then he had dipped the light casually into the back of the blue sedan. He yelled, "Hey, Sandy—in the *back!* Somebody . . ."

He ripped open the rear door and made a quick, expert inspection. "Woman!" he called excitedly. "Deader'n a mackerel."

Sandifer was older than Kenmore, more experienced. He was a good cop. He heard Kenmore say, "Looks like she's been shot."

Sandifer knew what to do and he did it fast. His Magnum leaped out of its holster and covered Clyde Graham. He said sharply, "Get out, you—and get out reaching."

Clyde got out. He put his hands high over his head and kept them there. Kenmore moved around to where he could command the situation from a good strategic angle. His gun was ready too.

Sandifer slipped his own gun back into the holster and produced a pair of handcuffs. He stepped in, turned Graham's compact muscular body and reached up for one wrist. He jerked the wrist down and clicked a cuff on it. He grabbed the other wrist and duplicated the procedure. Clyde's hands were safely cuffed in back of him now and Sandifer gave him a swift expert frisking. Clyde started to say something, but Sandifer barked, "Shut up!" He said to his partner, "Keep 'em both covered, Ken."

He inspected the back of the sedan and verified Kenmore's findings. Then he went to the police car and unhooked his microphone from the dashboard. He called Communications and did some fast talking. He was trying not to sound excited.

He put the transmitter back on the hook and waited until a voice came from City Hall downtown, acknowledging his call and ordering him to repeat his position and then to remain where he was. He went back to the police car and said, "They're on the way. Homicide probably."

The color had vanished from Kay Lambert's cheeks. She was still a pretty girl—still chic and smartly gowned—still obviously a lady. But her voice persisted in trembling. She said, "Let me tell you about it, Officer . . ."

"Sorry, lady. No talkin' now. You'll have lots of chance for that in a few minutes."

Graham pulled at the handcuffs which held his wrists pinioned behind his back. "If you'll just let us explain . . ."

"I ain't listenin', Bud. If you're smart, you'll save your breath."

Graham looked across at the girl he loved. He shrugged and shook his head. This was worse than he could possibly have anticipated. He wanted to applaud Kay's apparent calm. She stood there so quietly, looking so lovely in the gray coat and the pert little hat . . . so quietly and calmly that he was almost fooled.

Not quite, though, because he knew her too well and sensed what was going on inside. This was the bad break to end all bad breaks. The way the cops handled him—well, that was their job—but they made him feel like a criminal. They frightened him. He said to Kay, "Chin up, sweetheart."

"Sweetheart!" It was Kenmore's voice echoing the word. "So *that's* how it is, huh?"

Yes, that was how it was—and how it always would be. To the rest of the world she was a phenomenon—a most attractive girl who had inherited a business and who conducted it with the calm efficiency of a man. To Clyde Graham she was one hundred per cent woman, with all the good qualities the word implied.

Never in all his fairly eventful life had Graham experienced such a sensation of futility. To be standing in the middle of a road a few miles from Hollywood, unable to move, forbidden to talk, knowing that all the tough things which had happened in the past were a mere pallid prelude to what was in store for them —that was hard to take.

II

A hideous wail split the night and a pair of red glaring eyes whirled around a bend in the road. Behind the first police car came two others, then an ambulance, so that the road was no longer deserted. Casual motorists stopped to ask questions but a clipped authoritative voice ordered two men out of a traffic car and instructed them to keep the citizens' cars moving.

Everybody converged on the dark blue sedan, save only Officer Kenmore, who stood between Clyde Graham and Kay Lambert, eyes hostile and alert.

Clyde watched the newcomers inspecting his car, peering into it with electric torches, conferring with each other. He saw a man, whom he presumed to be a deputy coroner, clamber into the car and heard a detective say, "Careful, Doc. Don't touch anything."

Then two men detached themselves from the group and approached the trio standing near the police car. One of them was short, wiry, obviously in command. The other was huge. He had a face like granite. The smaller one said, "Okay, Kenmore. See what you can do to help over yonder."

That left Clyde and the girl alone with two detectives. Flashlight beams played over their faces briefly. The clipped voice of the smaller man said, "I'm Lieutenant Marty Walsh. Homicide. This"—designating the big man—"is Sergeant Vic Tremont."

"I'm Clyde Graham." Clyde's voice came out more like a croak. "This is Miss Katherine Lambert."

Walsh said, "Who's the dame in the back of the car?" And Graham answered quietly, "My wife."

Quite obviously Lieutenant Walsh was not accustomed to being surprised—but this hit him. His gray eyes became narrower and colder, his manner more careful. He said to Clyde, "What's Miss Lambert to you?"

"We're engaged to be married."

Vic Tremont said, "Cozy, huh?"

Clyde's cheeks flushed. "If you'd let me explain . . ."

"You're doin' okay. You'll do better later." That was Marty Walsh back in the saddle. "Right now there's things we got to find out in our own way. So you just answer."

Kay Lambert said, "If it weren't tragic, Lieutenant, it would be funny."

"What would?"

"Everything will sound so wrong when actually it isn't."

"Maybe you're right, Miss Lambert. Maybe it's okay that a man should be hellin' through Laurel Canyon at seventy miles an hour with his girl friend snuggled up

against him while his wife's murdered body is in the back of the car. But I ain't sure. Even in Hollywood that seems to be carryin' things kinda far."

"I didn't mean that," stated Kay with quiet dignity. "I mean that there isn't any way you can ask your questions that won't put Clyde and myself in the wrong light, whereas actually—"

Walsh cut her off. "You got a point there, Lady. But that's how it says in the rule book we ought to do it." He fired his next question at Graham. "You know your wife had been murdered?"

Clyde hesitated. "I knew she had been shot, yes."

"How'd you know that?"

"We stopped the car back yonder and looked."

"I bet she appreciated it. Those are the little touches that make married life beautiful."

"Damn it—" Clyde began but Kay interrupted.

She said, "Easy, darling. He's trying to needle you."

"He's succeeding."

Walsh flashed his partner a thin-lipped smile. "Two smart characters we got to deal with," he commented bitterly. "They know all about how detectives work." He turned back to Graham. "You kill your wife?"

"No."

"Miss Lambert kill her?"

"No."

"Who did?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"Think it might of been suicide?"

"It wasn't in character but it could have been."

"Only it wasn't," snapped Marty Walsh. "She was shot twice through the heart. Tell me this—where was you and this girl in such a hurry to get to?"

"The police. We were on our way to the Hollywood station."

"Well, whaddaya know!" Walsh's voice was tinctured with sarcasm. "You should of told us. It would of saved us a lot of trouble. You wouldn't, by any chance, have thought that there's a lot of places along this road where a body could be dumped so it wouldn't be found for a long time. Maybe never. You wouldn't maybe have figured that, would you?"

Kay looked levelly at the police lieutenant. "You've taken a belligerent attitude," she said. "There's no use trying to be reasonable in our answers. So I'll admit this—*if* one of us had killed Zelda and we were trying to hide her body we couldn't have found a better spot than one of the ravines along here. Only that isn't how it was."

"Of course not. You prob'ly figured it wasn't respectable to go riding around with a married man, so you brought his wife along as a chaperone."

"You don't believe us?"

"Your story stinks on ice."

Vic Tremont barged in. He said, "Either of you dump the body in the back of the car?"

"No."

"How'd you know it was there?"

"We were driving slowly," Clyde

explained. "Miss Lambert detected the odor of a perfume which she isn't in the habit of using. She started kidding me about having had another woman in my car. I told her she'd better look around and make sure. She did. She saw my wife's body."

"And was she surprised!"

"We stopped the car. It was obvious that Zelda was dead. We decided to drive into Hollywood and tell the police—there aren't any telephones around here. We were on our way when the police car stopped us. We wanted to tell them about it but we didn't have a chance. One of the officers turned his flashlight in the car and saw for himself. After that they refused to let us talk."

"Smart boys," approved Walsh. "They didn't have to listen to a lot of malarkey." He led the way to his own car. "Vic, you and this monkey sit in back. I'll stay up front with Miss Lambert. We got to stick around awhile, so we might as well be comfortable."

"Comfortable!" Clyde twisted his compact body and pulled against the cuffs. "With these things on?"

"Can't take 'em off, sonny. Right now we think you been a bad boy. We can't take chances with a guy we think maybe he's committed a murder."

Kay lighted a cigarette. She leaned over the back of the seat and held it between Clyde's lips. He puffed gratefully, filling his lungs with the smoke and exhaling slowly.

Kay was smiling. There wasn't any mirth in the smile but Clyde understood. She was trying to tell him that this wasn't as bad as it seemed at the moment, that they'd come out of it somehow, that he must try to keep a tight grip on himself. She was trying to tell him too, without words, that she loved him—and that was the sort of reassurance that Clyde needed most at that moment.

Walsh waited until his prisoner had smoked half the cigarette. Then he said, "Suppose we talk. We ran a make on that car, Graham. We know it's yours. So you start telling us the rest, beginning with this nifty little domestic setup."

Clyde knew that it was up to him to remain calm. The handcuffs helped. And the police. He had never before met cops in line of duty and they rather appalled him. They were frightening in their efficiency and in their skepticism. He dreaded the story he had to tell, knowing in advance that it was going to make things look even worse—if that were possible.

He said, "I'm going to give it to you briefly, Walsh. I got out of the army in September of forty-five. I'd been a captain in the Engineers and had served in the Pacific. While in the service—before going overseas—I met Zelda Farnsworth. We were married October sixth, nineteen forty-five. Within three or four months we knew the marriage had been a mistake."

"How come you got wise so fast?"

"We simply weren't congenial. If

I told you that she liked to play around and do a lot of drinking and night-clubbing, and that I wasn't built that way, it'd sound pretty corny . . ."

"It would at that."

"I'm telling you anyway. I tried to make a go of it and perhaps Zelda did too. But it simply wasn't in the cards."

"You got plenty of dough, Graham?"

"I had a little when I got out of the army—a few thousand dollars. I got a job."

"Where?"

"I went to work as service manager for Lambert Motors."

"Lambert Motors, huh?" Marty turned to Kay Lambert. "That Lambert wouldn't happen to be your old man, would it?"

"No," she said, "it wouldn't. I own Lambert Motors."

"Are you kiddin'?"

"I inherited it from my father. We're a pretty big agency. We needed a service manager. Clyde was a graduate engineer. We made a deal."

"Back in nineteen forty-five, huh? When he was just fresh married?"

"You know, Lieutenant, you could be amusing. After all, there are some important things in the world besides sex."

"Name two."

"Clyde was working on an invention."

Vic Tremont said, "He was tryin' to make something . . ." and broke into a roar of laughter which he choked off quickly at a disapproving glance from Walsh.

Kay continued imperturbably, ". . . and we arranged to equip one corner of the shop for him. He used our facilities. I was getting a superior service manager and he was getting what he wanted."

Tremont said, "I didn't even make no comment on that one, Marty."

Clyde Graham said, "Do you have to be a louse, Sergeant?"

"Hell, no, I don't *have* to. But it comes easy."

Kay said, "Same routine, Clyde. They're still trying to make you sore. They figure you'll be less discreet."

"That's right," applauded Vic. "I only pass out insults in line of duty. So I retract 'em on account you doped my angle. So this was strictly plutonic. You sold automobiles and the boy friend invented things. Meanwhile his wife doesn't understand him and they don't get along so good. So what happened then?"

Graham said tensely, "Shall I keep going, Kay?"

"You may as well."

"In June of nineteen fifty-three, Zelda and I were divorced."

"Where?"

"Here in California. Incompatibility. It was an interlocutory decree, which wasn't to become final until next June. We signed a property settlement—though there wasn't much to settle.

"In the settlement she took most of the tangible assets. She left me the patents I'd taken out on stuff I'd invented."

"You'd done the inventing while you were married?"

"Yes. So if there had been no divorce the proceeds from my inventions would legally have been classified as community property. I had invented one thing—I suppose you're not interested in details."

"I'm interested in everything."

"It's a non-reciprocating internal combustion engine, compact enough for use in an automobile. On the general principle of the gas turbine. A lawyer who represented me in New York started dickering with one of the big automobile concerns. I knew I had something good but I didn't know whether it was good enough to take seriously. And Zelda never regarded it as anything more important than a gadget."

"So-o?"

"In November—just a couple of months ago—Zelda showed up at my apartment one night. She said she was sick and in trouble. She put on a good act. I'm not a suspicious sort of person and even if I had been I couldn't see what she possibly could want from me. I didn't know then that she'd gotten advance information that one of the big Detroit auto firms was about to make an offer on my motor."

"I'm still listening."

"Zelda stayed in my apartment for more than two weeks, night and day, on the pretense of being ill. Then she filed papers to have the interlocutory decree set aside, claiming that marital relations had been reestablished during that time. She was lying, of course, but the presumptive evidence was strong and the Court ruled that way.

"As soon as I learned the truth I forced her to leave the apartment but the damage had been done. There we were, legally married again—just as though there'd never been any divorce proceedings, ever. The property settlement was automatically set aside and she was co-owner of everything I had, including proceeds from anything I might have invented during the period of our marriage.

"Just a couple of weeks ago I received a formal offer from this big automobile company. They offered me one hundred thousand dollars cash against a royalty for all rights to my new motor. I accepted."

"But she had beat you to the punch, huh? She was legally your wife again and in on half of it."

"Right."

"How much do you figure it would total?"

"That's hard to say, Lieutenant. The hundred thousand is certain. The rest would depend on what the company might plan to do with the motor. If they actually went into mass production it could run to well over a half million dollars."

"That's a lot of dough," murmured Walsh. "You'd been tricked into divvying with a gal you thought you were washed up with. You'd naturally be pretty mad, wouldn't you?"

"Yes—but not mad enough to commit murder."

III

Walsh directed his attention to Kay. He said, "You had all those reasons for being sore too, didn't you? Being set to marry Graham you could feel cheated even though it wasn't a community property deal as far as you were concerned. Also, instead of being able to marry Graham next June, you were gonna have to wait until he could get a new divorce and then wait an additional year beyond that time. Correct?"

"I wasn't influenced by the money," answered Kay. "I have enough. I did hate to be tricked into waiting an extra year to be married."

"You didn't like Mrs. Graham, did you?"

"No."

"You ever tangle with her?"

"No. I avoided her as much as possible."

"What did she think about you?"

"I don't think she cared one way or the other. She never pretended to be happy with Clyde and money was the only thing which could have caused her to act as she did."

"How about the two-three weeks she was livin' with Graham again —did you like that?"

"I believed her story about being sick and in trouble. Knowing how Zelda and Clyde felt about each other I certainly wasn't jealous. I'll admit that when I heard *why* she had done it I got angry."

"Because she'd sliced your future hubby out of a hunk of money?"

"I resented that, yes—for *his* sake. I resented even more that she'd introduced a cheap sordid element into our lives just when we thought things were running smoothly."

Marty Walsh said casually, "Graham is free now. He ain't married any more."

"I'll build it up a little more for you, Walsh." This was Clyde talking. "Zelda may have made a new will during the time we were separated. Knowing her I doubt it. If she didn't, then you'll find in my bank box her original will, which leaves everything to me."

"So when she died all the wrong she done you was fixed up and you were left just where you belonged to be by the terms of the property settlement, huh? That sure is cute."

"You're really trying to pin it on me, aren't you?"

"Hell, no, feller! I ain't tryin' to pin nothin' on nobody. I'm a cop, see. It's my job to find out what happened and why—and then to discover evidence to make it stick. If you're clean, you're clean —and we're friends. If you're not clean, I'll find out. The same goes for Miss Lambert here."

Kay said, "He thinks we murdered Zelda."

"I certainly ain't ready to concede you didn't. But you might not have done the job together. You could both be innocent. You could both be guilty. Or one of you might be guilty and one might be innocent. I suppose you got good alibis for each other."

Clyde said, "We were together."

"All evening?" A sharp question.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At a restaurant on Ventura Boulevard. A place called the Date Palm."

Vic Tremont said, "Hoodlum Paradise."

"What does that mean?" asked Clyde.

"All the West Coast racketeers hang around there. They don't own it but they kinda love it. It's Buzz Hickman's favorite spot and what Buzz likes his boys like too." He looked up sharply. "You know Buzz?"

Clyde nodded. He spoke slowly, carefully. "I've met him. I know a good deal about him."

"How come?"

"When my wife left me—after our interlocutory decree—last June, she achieved the reputation of being Buzz Hickman's girl friend."

Vic Tremont said, "It begins to fall into place, Loot. Gettin' tied up tighter'n a Christmas package. Tell me this, Graham—how did a nice girl like Mrs. Graham get mixed up with a hood like Buzz Hickman?"

"I don't know. But she was the type to be attracted by the false glamour these racketeers seem to have."

"Did she shack up with him after she left you?"

"I don't know and don't care."

"Could be that way. Could be also that you did care."

"Have it your own way, Tremont. I'm giving you facts as I know them."

Marty Walsh took over again. "You and Miss Lambert were at the Date Palm tonight. How'd you happen to pick that spot?"

"We didn't know anything about its reputation. We'd been there before. We liked the food and it was a good spot for dancing."

"See anybody there you knew?"

"Buzz Hickman was there. So was Zelda."

"Was they together?"

"No. He was with a rather voluptuous redhead."

"Tall girl? Follies type? Green eyes? Flashy dresser? Built like an almond bar with all the almonds in the right places?"

Kay Lambert said, "That's an accurate description, Lieutenant."

Walsh said to his partner, "You got her pegged, Vic?"

"Sure—Madge Walton. Buzz Hickman and her played house for a long time. Then there was a rumble he ditched her for a new babe. That could of been Mrs. Graham. I been hearing recently they were together again—Buzz and the Walton tomato."

Someone called for Lieutenant Walsh and Marty got out of the car and joined the group around Clyde's sedan. Vic Tremont relaxed and said pleasantly, "Smart cop, that Walsh."

Neither Kay nor Clyde said anything.

"Marty wouldn't try to pin no bum rap on nobody," continued Tremont. "He's got a job to do—he

does it. He never quits digging until he turns up whatever's there. He's a good guy to tell the truth to."

Kay said, "Are you trying to convince us—or yourself, Sergeant?"

"Me? Shuh! Lady, I was convinced long ago. If I'm working on you and Graham a little—why that's all in line of duty."

"We're telling the truth," stated Clyde. "And the more we tell it, the worse it sounds."

"You said it that time, brother. But I reckon you couldn't make up a real good answer why you and your girl friend was found driving around a lonely canyon with your wife's body in the back of the car. A guy who could think his way out of that would have to be smarter than just inventing a combustible engine."

Marty returned to the car. He said, "We're going downtown. Just a little gabfest. We'll take the cuffs off you soon as we get there."

Tremont asked, "The crime lab boys taking the car down?"

"Yeh. They found a couple of things in it. They think maybe there's more." He smiled at Kay with what he fancied was friendly warmth. "We got science in police work too, Miss Lambert. Murderers leave trails they don't know nothing about. It's those things that convict them."

Marty Walsh drove. Beside him was Clyde Graham. The position of his arms was almost unbearably uncomfortable. From wrists to shoulders he felt paralyzed.

They drove through the hills and dropped down into the brilliance of Hollywood. Winter chill was in the air but the night was clear as crystal. They went straight across town to Beverly Boulevard and turned left toward the downtown sector of Los Angeles.

En route Marty Walsh continued his interrogation. He said, "We got some interesting characters placed at the Date Palm tonight—you, Graham, and Miss Lambert. Buzz Hickman and his off-again-on-again gal friend, Madge Walton. Zelda Graham. Lots of others we'll find out about later. I got boys working on that angle. But I'm asking you both—was there anybody else in there either of you know?"

Clyde said "No," but Kay leaned forward and corrected him. She said, "My brother dropped in for a few minutes."

"Your brother?"

"Jimmy Lambert. Nineteen years old. Student at U.C.L.A. Played on the freshman football team last fall."

"Big guy, eh?"

"About one eighty-five."

"He pretty crazy about you, Miss Lambert?"

"We're all that's left of the family."

"You live together?"

"No. He lives with two friends in Westwood—near the campus."

"What'd he go to the Date Palm for?"

"He knew Clyde and I were dining there. He has a rattletrap car.

It had broken down near the restaurant and Jimmy was broke. He came in to borrow ten dollars."

"Everything go smooth and easy while he was in there?"

Kay hesitated. It was the briefest sort of a pause but the shrewd eyes of Marty Walsh didn't miss it. He said, "You might as well tell us, Miss Lambert. It's all gonna come out in the wash anyway."

IV

Kay glanced at Clyde as though for advice. He was frankly at a loss. Things had been piling up too swiftly and too formidably.

Perhaps it was the handcuffs, perhaps the knowledge that he was Suspect Number One—certainly his confidence was at low ebb. He wanted to be brave and cheerful but that wasn't easy when his arms were pinioned behind his back, when two alert detectives were parked alongside, probing relentlessly. Clyde wanted to advise Kay and didn't know how. She seemed to be taking this better than he was—certainly, she could be no more afraid.

He was glad of one thing. He was glad that he'd thought to have her return the gold cigarette case to her bag. It would be found there but never noticed. No one knew that it had been sitting on their table when Zelda joined them or that Zelda had resentfully grabbed it and carried it off with her. They wouldn't know that it had appeared again on Zelda's body when they'd found it in the back of the car. No need to feed the police that extra morsel. Things looked bad enough as they were.

Kay said, "May I tell you the whole story, Lieutenant?"

"That's what I'm waitin' for," answered Marty.

"Clyde picked me up at about eight-fifteen tonight. We got to the Date Palm a little before nine, had cocktails at our table and ordered dinner. It was about nine-twenty that we noticed Zelda. She was sitting at the bar."

"Alone?"

"I think so. I can't be sure. I thought she had been drinking too heavily. I can't explain why I thought so. You can sometimes sense those things. I felt embarrassed and uncomfortable. I hoped she wouldn't notice us—or if she did that she wouldn't do anything about it. I was too optimistic on both counts."

Kay hesitated. She fumbled in her bag and Marty quickly produced a pack of cigarettes and handed them to her. She took one and waited for him to light it. She said, "Thanks," and went on.

"At about nine-thirty Zelda walked from the bar to a corner table. A couple was sitting there. I believe the man was Buzz Hickman—he's been pointed out to me. The woman with him was—well, let's say ostentatious. She could have been the Madge Walton you were just discussing.

"I couldn't hear a word that was said. But it was obvious that Zelda and Hickman were quarreling. After awhile the redhead got up

from the table and walked on out."

"Where to?"

"Toward the rear. I don't know where she went. Buzz and Zelda continued quarreling. By that time I was sure she was drunk."

"Was she a heavy drinker?"

Kay hesitated but Clyde Graham answered. He said, "On occasion, yes. And when she drank too much she was quarrelsome."

"Did you think she was drunk?"

"Yes."

"All right, Miss Lambert . . ."

"Suddenly," continued Kay, "Hickman got up and walked toward the front door. I think he went outside but I can't swear to it."

"And then?"

"Zelda came to our table. Clyde and I were both embarrassed. We certainly hadn't expected to meet Zelda at the Date Palm. But there she was, and she brought to our table the backwash of her quarrel with Hickman. It wasn't nice."

"What was said?"

"Figure it for yourself, Lieutenant. She had been drinking, she was angry and I was dining with her husband."

Sergeant Tremont said, "In a situation like that my wife would sure raise hell. Can't say I'd blame her either."

"She knew all about us."

"That ain't no proof she had to like it."

Marty Walsh said, "So Mrs. Graham didn't like it. And neither did you, huh?"

"I loathed it."

"What did you do?"

"Clyde suggested I leave the table until Zelda had gone. I went to the cocktail lounge."

"Anybody in there you knew?"

"I don't think so."

"You stayed there all the time?"

"Yes."

"But you can't prove it, can you?"

"Do I have to?"

"Under the law, no—but it would help." Walsh turned his attention to Clyde Graham. "What happened between you and your wife after Miss Lambert left you?"

"I told her to get out."

"You were sore?"

"Yes."

"And so was she?"

"Naturally."

"Keep talkin', Graham."

"I got up from the table. So did Zelda. I took her arm and walked her outside—through the front door. I thought a touch of fresh air might clear her head."

"Did she like being pushed around that way."

"No."

"Where'd you walk?"

"Back and forth—along the side of the building."

"Through the parking lot?"

"I suppose you'd call it that." Clyde laughed shortly. "You certainly can put two and two together and make nine, can't you, Walsh? Yes, we walked around in the parking lot. Zelda continued quarreling. I finally left her there."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Alive?"

Graham controlled himself with

an effort. He said, "Yes, she was alive."

"See anything of Miss Lambert around that parking lot?"

"No—damn it, Walsh, you can't pin this on her! She was inside."

"That's what *she* says," stated Marty reasonably. "By your own admission you don't know where she was. She doesn't know where you were. So your mutual alibis ain't worth a hoot. You could of killed your wife or Miss Lambert could of killed her after you went back inside the joint. I'm not accusing you—I'm just explaining. Now, when you came back in . . ."

"I went to our table."

"Miss Lambert wasn't there, was she?"

"No."

"You see her right away?"

"I looked for her. She was in the lobby, near the checkroom."

"Could of been just comin' in, huh?"

Kay said quietly, "I could have been but I wasn't. I hadn't been outside."

Marty Walsh shrugged. "Maybe we'll have luck checking on that, Miss Lambert. Now then . . ."

"My brother had just come in. He was with me when Clyde joined us at the table."

"Had you told him the score?"

"Reluctantly."

"Spread that out a little, will you?"

"He asked where Clyde was. He saw I was upset. His first thought —he said—was that Clyde and I had quarreled. To set him straight on that I told him the truth. Then, as I say, Clyde joined us. I gave Jimmy the money he needed and he left."

Her voice took on an edge. "And you don't need to tell me what you're thinking, Lieutenant. I know. Yes, Jimmy was mad. Yes, he'd regard himself as my protector. Yes, he went outside where he could have walked into the parking lot. Yes, as far as I know Zelda was still out there. No, Jimmy didn't like Zelda. But when you meet the boy you'll realize that he's not the type who would murder anyone."

"They never are," murmured Sergeant Tremont. "But somebody sure gave a good imitation of murder right about that time."

Kay said, "The rest you know, Lieutenant. Clyde and I pretended to eat our dinner. Shortly before eleven o'clock we confessed we were whipped. He paid the check and drove off in his car."

"Which had been parked in that lot?"

"Yes."

"You claim you didn't see Zelda Graham again?"

"I didn't. I'm sure Clyde didn't, either. We started to drive home. I noticed the unusual perfume. I told you before that I started kidding Clyde about it. Perhaps you will understand that it wasn't very gay kidding. I was merely trying to lighten things up a little. I turned around and saw the body . . ." She spread her hands and looked at the

keen eyes of the detective. "It doesn't sound very good, does it?"

"Couldn't sound worse," he agreed cheerfully. "But I ain't tellin' you nothin' you don't know already."

That, reflected Clyde, was true enough. Except that the way Marty went at things, they sounded worse than they were. There was truth in so much of it—that he didn't actually know where Kay had been for part of that time nor could she testify with certainty as to what he had done. He couldn't blame the police for being suspicious.

He was horribly worried. And he was more concerned about Jimmy Lambert than he would have admitted. He recalled Jimmy's youthful resentment, his statement, "Somebody ought to do something about a bitch like that."

Jimmy was a kid. He adored Kay, he had the protective instinct ingrained. Yet—to shoot a woman, even under such provocative circumstances—it simply wasn't in character. But Clyde knew that the cops might think differently.

The police car sped down the First Street hill, made a half circle around the City Hall and rolled up the ramp into the basement garage. The two detectives, plus Kay and Clyde, walked up two short flights of stairs to a tremendous corridor. They made a sharp right turn and paused before a door marked *Homicide.* There was a number on it—42. They went inside. A heavy-set detective drew Marty aside. He said, "Valley dicks brought 'em in."

"Who?" Marty Walsh asked.

"Buzz Hickman. Waiter named Paul. Louie, the bartender. Madge Walton. Jimmy Lambert was picked up in West L. A."

"Any of Hickman's boys here?"

"Eddie Keeler. He's yellin' his head off about we can't shove Buzz around like this."

Marty said coldly, "Somebody better teach that Keeler the facts of life. Where does he fit in on this deal?"

"Nowhere except he's Hickman's Man Friday. Wasn't even at the Date Palm when it happened."

"Buzz don't go for it?"

"Haven't asked him, Marty. It's your baby."

The two radio cops who originally had found the body of Zelda Graham were there. One of them unlocked Clyde's handcuffs. He could scarcely move his arms at first—then he felt the circulation start again. He smiled at Kay and gave her the tiniest sort of a wink. She smiled back but each knew the other was putting on an act.

The inside of rooms 42 and 43 looked like a convention. Clyde knew some of the people and he could guess at identities of the rest. He spotted Buzz Hickman and there was no mistaking the curvaceous Madge Walton.

Jimmy Lambert was seated behind a desk in the corner, as though he were a trifle more behind the eight-ball than the others. He looked big and powerful and very very young. His sun-bleached hair was touseled as usual and behind his eyes there was a troubled light.

He started to get up as Kay walked in but the uniformed cop standing next to him put a restraining hand on his shoulder. He and Kay smiled at each other, each pretending to feel calm and confident.

Marty Walsh and Vic Tremont went into the next room, where they went into conference with a couple of the boys from the crime lab. After a little while, Marty returned to the impromptu convention hall. He said, "Okay, Buzz. In here."

V

Buzz Hickman got up. Beside the policeman he looked smaller than his five-seven. He was slender and immaculately — almost foppishly—dressed. He was swarthy and his black hair was shiny and much too fragrant. His voice was gentle, his manner self-possessed, even slightly tolerant.

He wore a conservative chalk-stripe blue suit, the shoulders of which were a thought too wide, the cut of which was just a bit too perfect. He looked like a small successful businessman, a minor real estate operator, perhaps. He looked like anything but what he was—which was the number-one racketeer of the Pacific Coast, a man who had beaten five felony raps, including one for murder.

As he started across the room, another man joined him. This was Eddie Keeler, whom Clyde had heard referred to as Buzz Hickman's Man Friday. He too didn't look the part. He looked like Jimmy Lambert twelve years older, twenty pounds heavier and a shade more blond.

In dress he was excessively Hollywood—loud sports coat, razor-creased gabardine slacks, gray wool shirt, no necktie, fancy belt, elaborate moccasin-type shoes and a pair of Argyle socks in which yellow was the least obtrusive color. He ranged alongside Buzz Hickman and asked permission to be present at the interrogation of his boss.

Marty said coldly, "Where do you figure in, Eddie?"

"I work for Buzz—you know that."

"You're not his lawyer."

"I'm his friend. And I know he didn't have anything to do with this mess."

"How come you know so much about it? Were you there?"

"No. But he ain't the type. You know as well as I do, Marty, that Buzz don't go in for no rough stuff. If he wanted it done he'd get somebody else to do it."

"How do we know he didn't hire someone to do his dirty work? You, for instance."

"Maybe I did at that." It was apparent that Eddie Keeler shared his boss' contempt for the law. "I kill women every day and twice on Tuesdays."

Vic Tremont moved alongside the blond young giant. "You ain't been worked over recently, have you, bub?"

Eddie met his eye squarely. "That sort of talk don't throw no

scare into me, Vic. You can pitch me in the can if you want on any charge you trump up. But you and your boys ain't gonna lay a finger on me."

Vic looked appealingly at Marty. He said, "Look, Lieutenant, this joker needs to be trimmed down to size. If you'll gimme just five minutes with him . . ."

"Later," snapped Marty. "On account when it happens I want to be on it. I'm fed up with these punks who got big-shot complexes." He stood in front of Eddie Keeler and regarded him coldly. "One of these days, feller," he said, "You're gonna talk yourself into a lot of trouble. You're out of this deal. Take my advice and stay out."

"I'm riding along with Buzz."

"To hell with you! You're doing what we say."

Hickman spoke quietly to his henchman. He said, "Take it easy, Eddie. They got nothing on me. Couple hours we'll walk out of here and have a drink together."

"I ain't gonna leave them shove you around, Boss."

"There's nothing you can do about it now, Eddie. Later—some other time—that's a different story."

Buzz turned and walked gracefully into the next room. Eddie Keeler said something under his breath and Marty Walsh whirled on him, his eyes dangerous. He said, "Keep that lip buttoned, mugg. One more crack like that out of you, you fat-headed . . ."

Keeler shrugged. "Go peddle your apples, copper. Try scarin' children but don't pull that tough stuff on me."

Marty started to close the door, then nodded to Kay Lambert and Clyde Graham. "You two want in?" he asked.

They didn't know whether it was a request or an order—but they followed him through the door. Marty motioned them to adjoining chairs. He smiled thinly and said, "No talking to each other," and they nodded.

But Clyde did reach out his hand and take Kay's. There was comfort in this brief physical contact. It gave each of them a feeling of being together and that was good, because each passing moment enhanced their fear.

The enormity of the thing was just beginning to register. It became more acute when one of the other homicide detectives poked his head in the door and notified Marty Walsh that, "This room out here is lousy with reporters and photographers, Lieutenant." Marty told him to keep 'em quiet for awhile —he'd give them the whole story as soon as he had it. "And," he added as an afterthought, "They're not to do any interviewing of the other people out there."

He seated himself behind a big flat-topped desk marked Capt. J. F. Carnes. Clyde noticed that there was a fine-looking man of about 45, with graying hair and glasses, sitting unobtrusively in a corner, a stenotype machine on his lap. Vic Tremont lounged in a corner of the

room, keeping a vigilant eye on Buzz Hickman.

Marty Walsh motioned Hickman to a chair across the desk from him and said quietly, "You know most of the score, Buzz. Suppose you tell it to us."

Hickman said, "I didn't kill the broad."

"Of course not. Murder is illegal and you wouldn't do nothing that's out of line. Before we go on—do you know who these people are?"

Hickman ran his eyes over Kay and Clyde. "Zelda's husband and his girl friend, aren't they?"

"How'd you know?"

"Zelda saw them in the Date Palm tonight and popped off about 'em, but good."

Walsh said, "I'm giving you a chance, Buzz. We know a lot about what happened out there tonight. We don't know all. Maybe you can fill in some of the blank spaces."

If Hickman was worried, he didn't show it. At the most this situation seemed to affect him as an annoyance—something to be tolerated. He said, "Graham was lucky to get rid of that dame. She was pure poison."

"About tonight . . ."

"I get to the Date Palm about seven o'clock and go back to the office. I got a piece of the joint and I use the office all the time. About twenty minutes after that Madge Walton comes in. She's twenty minutes late, which is on time for her. Paul has my regular table fixed up in the corner, where it ain't too noisy or too bright, and we eat together. We take our time about it.

"About then I feel somebody givin' me the eye. I look around and it's Zelda Graham. She's at the bar, lapping 'em up. Already she's stinko. Right then I know it ain't gonna be nice. Around nine-thirty she comes over to my table and starts raisin' hell."

"About what?"

"Zelda never needed no excuse—especially when she had a snootful. She's tearin' into me and needling Madge with the ritz treatment."

"How sore was she making Madge?"

"Plenty. But not sore enough for Madge to shoot her. Anyway, it ain't enough she should work on us but by that time she has also seen her husband and his babe eatin' together and she gives us an earful of that."

"You didn't like it, did you?"

"I didn't like no part of it. I don't go for that sort of stuff. Madge was gettin' more burned up by the minute. I seen it wouldn't be long before there was a catfight, so I sent Madge away."

"Where'd she go?"

"I told her to wait for me in the office. Then I started tellin' Zelda off, but good. If you wanna know was I teed off, I'll tell you right now the answer is yes. I take all I can, then I tell her the hell with her and I scram."

"Where did you go?"

"To the office."

"Was Madge Walton there?"

"No. She come in later. I ast

her where she'd been and she said to the powder room."

"Hmm! That'd be lots of powder, wouldn't it, Buzz?"

"I wouldn't be knowing."

"And after that . . .?"

"Her and I, we sat around for about an hour. She had a few drinks and I had one. I never drink much. We talked."

"About what?"

"Oh, this and that."

"You're quite a character, aren't you, Buzz? Always dishing out information. Anyway, after you finished talkin' about this and that, what time was it?"

"A few minutes before eleven. I found out from Paul that Zelda had beat it. So Madge and I went back to our table."

"Did you see Miss Lambert and Clyde Graham?"

"They was at the checkroom, just leaving."

"How'd they look?"

"Okay. I didn't pay a helluva lot of attention."

"Did either of 'em look as though they might have just killed Zelda Graham?"

"I couldn't say, Marty. Never having had nothing to do with murder I ain't got no idea how people look when they finish committing one."

"Okay." Marty scribbled a few notes on a pad. "Just a few more questions, Buzz. Lemme have the story of you and Madge Walton and Zelda Graham. Before tonight."

Hickman hesitated. Then he said, "Madge had been my gal friend for a long time before Zelda came along. I saw Zelda here and there a few times, then I heard she was divorced. I liked her looks and when she started hanging around the Date Palm regular I commenced making a play for her."

"Why?"

"I liked her. Or maybe I didn't. I never really pegged that one, Marty. To me she had class and I always liked class. I couldn't tell for sure whether it was that that got me or just because she was another dame. Anyhow, things worked out."

"Meaning you clicked—all the way?"

Hickman glanced uncertainly at Clyde. Then he said, "Yeh. That's how it was."

"How did Madge Walton take this?"

"Not good. She raised hell."

"You throw her out?"

"Not exactly. She walked out."

"She ever threaten to do anything about it?"

"Madge was always blowing her top. Sure she threatened but it was just words."

"Did she ever own a twenty-two high standard automatic?"

"Not that I know of."

"Did you?"

"Nope. Only gun I got is a thirty-eight special and that's registered."

"That all you got to tell us?"

"What else would there be?"

Marty's eyes were like ice. "Up to now," he said, "we just been

playin' games, Buzz? From here out, it's different."

"I don't dig that."

"You will. Zelda Graham was killed at approximately ten-thirty. Probably in the rear of the parking lot adjoining the Date Palm. Your car was parked there. So was hers. So was Clyde Graham's. Whoever shot her held the gun up close and gave it to her twice. Nice, neat and businesslike. Somebody who knew all about the penetrating power of a twenty-two-long rifle cartridge. Her body was shoved into the back of Graham's car. We think you did it."

Buzz Hickman didn't appear to be vastly impressed. "Anything goes haywire you coppers always think I done it. You're always wrong. You're wrong now. The D. A. will never issue on a charge like this."

"I think he will."

"Why?"

"Because we tie you up with putting the body in the car, Buzz—and that's close enough. We got our report from the crime lab. On Zelda Graham's dress we found a few hairs that used to belong to you. They're about as good as fingerprints. We found a tiny piece of fabric which matches that suit you're wearing. How do you like them apples?"

Buzz sat silent for perhaps twenty seconds. Clyde could almost hear his brain working. Then he said carefully, "I don't like it, Marty—on account it's all lies."

"We think different."

"That I don't believe. How about *these* folks?" He nodded at Clyde and Kay Lambert. "Graham was sore at her for horning in on half his dough with that divorce business—having the interlocutory decree set aside."

"You know all about that, huh?"

"Sure—Zelda told me. She wanted back after Graham booted her out the second time. Graham could of done it on his own, or Miss Lambert could of done it, or they could of pulled the job together. I think they did."

Clyde leaned forward in his chair. He said, "May I say something, Lieutenant?"

"Take it, Jackson."

"What this man is saying doesn't make sense. Forget the hairs and the fabric you say you found on Zelda's body. If I had killed her I'd have put the body anywhere in the world except in my own car. Miss Lambert would have done the same thing if you can presume she had strength enough to move a dead body, which I doubt."

"The two of you together," snapped Buzz. "Maybe you walked up on Miss Lambert just after she had shot Zelda. So you helped. You picked your own car so you could take the body somewhere and dump it. Ain't that what you was tryin' to do when the radio car picked you up?"

VI

Clyde was angry. He turned to Marty Walsh and found the detective's eyes focused on him specu-

latively. Marty said, "Buzz has a point, Graham. If it had been that way you'd never tell us the truth about it."

Buzz said, "How about this kid brother of Miss Lambert's? He was there and he knew what was goin' on about them."

"How'd you know all this, Buzz?"

"It's my business to know things. Fellers workin' at the Date Palm keep their ears open an' they tell me." He picked a cigar out of his breast pocket, snipped the end and lighted it with meticulous care. "What gives from here, Marty? You booking me?"

"I ain't sure. I got others to talk to." Walsh crossed the room and propelled Buzz Hickman through the door. Eddie Keeler stood up to greet his boss. He said, "They didn't try to get rough with you, did they, Buzz?"

"Hell, no."

"So they ain't as dumb as they look."

Vic Tremont bore down on the massive Eddie. He said, in a deceptively soft voice, "You're leadin' with your chin, sonnyboy."

Keeler looked straight at the big detective and laughed. "I ain't been in the rackets long, Tremont. But I been around long enough so I don't get scared of words."

"Maybe you'd be smarter if you did. You might live longer."

Walsh left Hickman and the belligerent Keeler in the outer room. He summoned Paul, the waiter—Louie, the bartender—Jimmy Lambert—Madge Walton. He permitted Clyde and Kay to remain as audience. Vic Tremont drifted back into the room with them.

Louie, who was 51 years old, bald as a coot, enormously fat and had the pinkish complexion of a baby, told a simple direct story.

"I don't talk much, Lieutenant," he explained, "but I see plenty and hear more. A little after half past eight this Zelda comes in and perches at the bar. She's all dolled up like a Christmas tree—mink coat, jade earrings, jade ring—fancy dress, little round hat with a jade pin on it and three jade bracelets. Anyhow the stuff looked like jade.

"She had a talkin' jag on. She downed a quickie — bourbon straight—and ordered another. She wanted to know all about Buzz and was he still sore at her and how things was with him and Madge Walton. All the time Zelda was talking she was smoking like a chimbley—one right after the other. She had her pack of cigarettes sittin' on the bar and when she finished it she got another outa the machine and started in on that.

"While she was talkin' and drinkin' and smokin', she seen her husband and that lady yonder eatin' dinner. That was something else she didn't like. She started tellin' me her husband shouldn't act like that an' he was still her husband because the divorce had been set aside, so they had to start from taw again. All the time I'm listenin' an' sayin' nothin' except yeah an' no an' things like that.

"Around nine-thirty she goes to

Buzz's table and they have a beef of some kind. I don't see too much of it, on account I'm busy. Fifteen-twenty minutes later Buzz walks out on her."

"Leaving Madge Walton at the table?"

"No. Madge had beat it."

"You see where she went?"

"I ain't got no idea. Well, anyway, Zelda joins Graham an' Miss Lambert. There's more trouble—or anyway what looks like trouble. Graham finally gets up, looking mad. He takes Zelda by the arm and pilots her t'ords the front door. That's the last I seen of them until he come back maybe fifteen minutes later. He was alone then."

"About Miss Lambert," inquired Walsh easily. "Did you notice where she was when Graham and Mrs. Graham went out?"

"I didn't see her."

"She said she was in the cocktail lounge."

"Could be she was. I can see part of the lounge from behind the bar but not all of it."

Walsh sent Louie back into the other room. He asked Paul for his story.

Paul's recital was brief enough. He had waited on Buzz's table and also Clyde Graham's. He corroborated the story of the quarrels at both tables and his estimate of time checked with theirs.

Walsh asked, "Did you hear any threats?"

"Yeah. Mrs. Graham—Zelda—was shootin' off her mouth about she wasn't gonna take it any more."

"Anybody threaten Zelda?"

"Not that I heard."

Walsh said coldly, "You're lying!"

"Honest . . ."

"You heard Madge Walton threaten, didn't you?"

Paul flushed. "I never heard nothin' like that."

Madge Walton broke in. "But I *did* threaten her," she said.

Clyde regarded the speaker with interest. Madge wasn't the type of woman to pass unnoticed in any gathering. Her feminine attributes were obvious and intriguing.

"How did you threaten Zelda?" asked Marty.

"I called her a few names. Then I said if I ever got her alone I'd break her damned neck."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because somebody probably overheard and if I hadn't come clean I'd be out on a limb. Second, because you got three people to hang this on—Mr. Graham, Miss Lambert and Buzz. Buzz is clean on it."

"How do you know?"

"I know Buzz, that's how."

"You're still overboard about him ain't you?"

"I am," she said with an odd dignity. "I always will be."

"How'd you feel when he chucked you out in favor of Zelda Graham?"

Her eyes were hard. "You answer that one, Lieutenant. Use any words you want and you still won't have said more than half."

"You hated her."

"Right down the line," she said.

"How come Buzz went for her so hard?"

"He thought he was climbing in the world by shacking up with her. He was always a sucker for what he called culture. He was impressed because she knew more five-syllable words than I did. Well, she also knew more one-syllable ones."

"You'd like to have seen something happen to her, wouldn't you?"

"Sure. There was a time when I'd have helped too. But not since a long time—and certainly not tonight."

"Why not? She'd split with her husband again, she was lousy with money—and she was making a new pitch for Buzz."

"He wasn't having any more. He had learned what a sucker he was the first time."

"You seem pretty sure of yourself for a gal who'd once been thrown out on her ear."

"It's like I told you before: I know Buzz Hickman."

Marty said, "You were in that powder room a long time, weren't you?"

"Yes—too long. I was putting on a new face. I was trying to cool off before I met Buzz again. I knew we'd talk about Zelda and I thought it wouldn't be smart for me to show how sore I was. Then I went into the office. He was already there."

"You didn't see him come in and didn't know where he'd been?"

"Nope. I didn't," she said.

"And you didn't kill Zelda Graham . . . of course?"

"I did not."

Marty turned pained eyes toward his partner. "Vic," he said sadly, "that's what I hate about murders. You get a dead body—two bullets right through the heart—lots of people with motive—but nobody did it. Madge didn't do it, Buzz didn't do it, Graham didn't do it, Miss Lambert didn't do it—and now I'm about to hear that Jimmy Lambert didn't do it."

Jimmy got up. He looked very large and very youthful. He said, "That's right, Lieutenant. The idea never would have occurred to me."

"You own a twenty-two high standard? Any of your friends own one?"

"I never had one in my hand—except once when I was hunting in the High Sierras and we did some target shooting."

"But you do know how to handle one, don't you?"

"I can handle most types of gun."

"After you left your sister did you see anything happening in the parking lot—anything unusual?"

"I didn't go that way. I went back to my car. I had a friend waiting. We went to a service station down the road, had the car fixed and drove off."

Marty glanced at the clock. The hour hand pointed to three. He had been on the job since eight the previous morning and he was tired. He made no attempt to stifle a

yawn and then set Tremont into the other room with Jimmy Lambert and Madge Walton. As the door closed behind them he looked gloomily at Clyde and Kay. "Hell of a note," he commented.

His guests said nothing.

"You've heard it," Walsh went on. "Got anything to offer?"

Kay said, "I'd like to ask something, Lieutenant."

"Nobody's stopping you."

"I've heard about this Buzz Hickman. Everybody has. But I don't know whether the stories I've gotten have been exaggerated. What is he really?"

"High-class hoodlum," stated Marty. "Rackets ain't what they used to be during prohibition but they still exist and there's lots of money in 'em. They still got all the trimmings—big shots and little shots—slick unscrupulous lawyers—musclemen.

"The chief source of income is the bookie racket but it runs into every other line, too—gambling, prostitution, dope. Of course, bookmaking is the big source of revenue. It's run on a national basis. Buzz Hickman is the number one man on the Pacific Coast. He takes general policy orders from the East but otherwise he runs things the way he wants 'em."

"Would he murder someone?"

"He did once but that was when he was number two man. Where he stands now, if he wanted some rough stuff pulled, he'd probably get someone to do it for him."

"Except," insisted Kay, "where a woman was involved. That could make a difference, couldn't it?"

"Yeh. That's why I still like him for this job. Zelda could have caught him off base."

Clyde Graham asked, "How about me?"

"I like you better, Graham—you or Miss Lambert. I'm not holding you. I'd do it if you were the only suspects but now the joint's jumping with 'em. I'm turning you loose—at least until I got something more to go on—or until I got less on the others. It's a cinch you wasn't *all* in on it."

Clyde said, "I still insist I wouldn't have been so stupid as to have put Zelda's body in my own car."

"I can't buy that. Like Buzz said you could maybe have been on your way to dump her." Marty lighted a cigarette deliberately, inhaled slowly and then looked at them in a level appraising way which was, to say the least, disconcerting.

"I wouldn't like to be where you are, either of you. You're not being booked but you're definitely under suspicion of murder." He thought for a moment, then said, "Graham, your wife must really of been a tramp."

Clyde flushed. "I suppose . . . Perhaps what you've heard tonight makes her sound worse than she really was."

"How come you took her back when she was making the pitch to have that divorce set aside?"

"I didn't know what she was after. I had once been in love with

her. It never occurred to me that she was throwing curves."

"You didn't get wise either, Miss Lambert?"

"No. I didn't like it but she was still technically Clyde's wife in spite of the interlocutory decree."

Walsh got up. "I'm out on my feet," he said. "Maybe you are too. Beat it. You'll be hearing from us."

They picked up Jimmy in the outer office. The room was still crowded. Buzz Hickman and Eddie Keeler were in a huddle on the end of a long wooden bench which was backed against the wall. Madge Walton was sitting near them, looking worried. Vic Tremont and a couple of other detectives were hanging around and there were a few policemen in uniform.

The technical boys were still holding Clyde's car, so Jimmy crowded his sister and Clyde into his jalopy. They stopped at a drive-in for coffee. Jimmy was excited and nervous. Kay seemed to be taking it in stride. Graham was outwardly calm and inwardly the most disturbed of the trio.

Jimmy left them at Kay's apartment. Clyde and Kay went inside, took off their wraps, and seated themselves on the couch. Only the foyer light illumined the room. It seemed ineffably quiet and peaceful and remote from trouble.

VII

Clyde put his arm around Kay and held her tight. Everything seemed so safe and secure now. He felt Kay's body quiver and knew that she was crying. No hysteria, no wild emotion—just a slow, quiet crying which was somehow worse than frenzy.

In the semi-darkness they spoke almost at the same instant, almost in the same words. Each said, "I've got to know. Did you . . . ?" and left the rest of the sentence hanging in mid-air.

Then both said, "No, I didn't."

But there it was, starkly in the open. Each knew that it was physically possible for the other to have killed Zelda. Each knew that it was emotionally possible. Both understood that common sense indicated otherwise but then common sense didn't rate very importantly where murder was concerned.

Clyde said, "That's bad, sweetheart. If *we're* in doubt about each other—can you blame Marty Walsh for what he's thinking?"

She clung to him and said, "I'm afraid."

"So am I." He got up and pulled her to her feet. For a few precious moments he held her close. "Turn in," he ordered. "I'm sleeping here on the couch."

She didn't argue. He heard her moving about in the bedroom and after awhile he heard her say, "I'm in bed, Clyde. I'll try to get some sleep."

He walked into the room. In the half light she looked lovely and desirable and utterly exhausted. He sat on the edge of the bed holding her hand, desperately afraid for her and for himself. After awhile she was still and just as the dawn broke

he knew from her breathing that she was asleep.

He tiptoed into the next room and threw himself on the couch. The next thing he knew it was ten-thirty and Kay was bending over the coffee table next to the couch. She was carrying a tray containing orange juice, toast and coffee for two.

They both carried it off well, though perhaps with a too-careful avoidance of the topic of murder.

Kay used her car and dropped Clyde off at his apartment. Then she drove on to the offices of Lambert Motors while he went inside and bathed, changed and shaved.

He glanced at the morning paper. There wasn't too much in it, not nearly as much as he knew would be plastered all through the evening editions. But there was still more than enough.

There were reporters and photographers waiting for Clyde at Lambert Motors. He protested against pictures, then yielded because he knew they'd already got some and he couldn't avoid publicity. He did draw the line, however, at posing before the bench where he had invented his now-famous non-reciprocating internal combustion automobile engine. And he gave an emphatic no to one photographer's brilliant idea that he should stand there looking as if he were inventing something while Kay hung over his shoulder, helping him invent.

He got through the ordeal somehow, making the best of a very bad bargain. At five o'clock he knocked off and changed clothes. Kay drove him home and said she'd be back later to pick him up for dinner. It was his suggestion that they fix a private meal at his place and she checked in readily with the idea and said she'd return with the ingredients.

As a dinner party it wasn't too successful. There were too many telephone calls from friends who were genuinely concerned and from acquaintances who were ghoulishly curious. They expected to hear from Marty Walsh but Marty didn't call.

Nothing happened for the ensuing three days except that the newspapers reported that Buzz Hickman had been hauled in three times for questioning in what was now referred to as "The Blue Sedan Murder." Since Buzz was a known character and therefore somewhat beyond the pale, the press went all out in hinting that the cops had pretty definite ideas concerning Mr. Hickman.

Clyde went to his wife's funeral. It was quiet and dignified, the last and least ostentatious event in her rather spectacular life. But the Chapel was crowded, much to the husband's surprise—until he figured that most of the people were strangers who were reluctant to miss any single item of the sordid drama.

Only one new thing developed. Marty Walsh telephoned to say they had searched through Zelda's effects and no new will had turned up, so evidently Clyde was her sole

heir. The way he said it sounded sinister, as though he'd stated that now he had in his possession all the motive a man could ask. Actually Clyde was sorry. He had hoped there'd be a will leaving her estate to someone — anyone — preferably Buzz Hickman.

The .22 with which Zelda had been killed was found in the shrubbery back of the parking lot. It wasn't registered and no owner came forward to claim it. It was traced eventually to a hardware store in Georgia, where it had been sold many years before. The person who had bought it said he had sold it to someone—he didn't remember who—so that the police found themselves up another blind alley.

Time, however, was getting in its good work. Each passing day made the remembrance more tolerable—each hour that developed no further tangible danger made the situation seem less frightening.

Until the following Tuesday night. Until the seventh night after the death of Zelda Graham.

Clyde and Kay were driving. They had gone a considerable distance up the coast highway and were on their way back toward Brentwood. Clyde turned left at Topanga Canyon because that was much the longest route home.

Both noticed a car behind them. Neither thought much about it at first. A few minutes later Clyde decided that the glare of the other car's headlights were reflected too brightly in his rearview mirror. He slowed down and cut to the right of the road to let the second car pass.

The car came alongside, then swerved sharply to the right, pinning Clyde against the wall of the cliff and compelling him to slam on his brakes in order to avoid a collision.

Two men got out of the other car. Both had guns. They approached Clyde's car from two sides. The larger man said, "Out—both of you."

Clyde flashed a quick glance at Kay. She was pale but if she was frightened she didn't show it.

He said, "What is this—a holdup?"

"You'll find out," stated the big man unpleasantly.

The guns looked formidable. Clyde and Kay got out of their car. Clyde was thinking fast. If this *was* a holdup he'd let them have his wallet, his watch—anything they wanted. He'd advise Kay to hand over her valuables. There wasn't anything spectacular about that course of action but it had the advantage of being sensible.

The big man held his gun on Clyde and said to his companion, "Frisk him, Joe."

Joe did a swift, expert job. He said, "No rod, Nick. How about the dame?"

"I have no gun," stated Kay in a surprisingly steady voice.

"Okay. Now get this—" Nick wanted to sound tough and was succeeding admirably. "We're takin' you somewhere. I'm ridin' with

Graham. Joe, you'll take Miss Lambert. If she tries any funny stuff let her have it. If Graham tries anything with me let her have it anyway." He turned to Clyde. "You grab that, fella?"

"I understand." He looked at Kay. "We'd better do what they say, sweetheart."

She nodded and climbed into the second car. Nick motioned Clyde Graham back to the wheel of his own car. He said, "Foller Joe. Close but not too close. Anything goes wrong Miss Lambert gets it."

They headed in the general direction of the Valley. It was lonely country. Joe drove carefully, dimming his lights for passing motorists, making an obvious effort to attract no attention.

Clyde thought of a half dozen plans but discarded them all. He knew now that this wasn't a holdup. It was something a lot bigger than that, something that was tied in with the murder of his wife. He asked, "What's it all about, Nick."

"How you know my name?"

"I heard Joe use it."

"An' you know his name on account you heard me say it, huh?"

"That's it."

"Well, after awhile you forget Nick and Joe, see. You live longer that way."

"Where are we going?"

"You'll find out."

"You know this is kidnapping, don't you?"

"Sure is kidnapping. Is lots of things. Only we don't worry. All the worry we do, you do it for us."

"You haven't told me where we're going."

"That's right. But I tell you this much, fella. You talk too much."

Clyde shut up. He settled back in the seat, watching the road, estimating distances, cataloguing their route for future reference.

He was frankly frightened, in small degree for himself, in greater degree for Kay. He was alert, tense, watchful. If and when the time came he'd act—but not until there seemed a chance of accomplishing something.

They neared the Valley. But before dropping down from the hills they swung off the main highway onto a narrow poorly paved road. They circled to the back of an unpretentious house which could have been the home of Mr. John Q. Citizen, mortgage and all. The cars stopped and the unwilling passengers were ordered out. At gunpoint they were conducted through the back door, through a kitchen and into a living room.

It was a nice room, ornately furnished but comfortable. There were heavy drapes at the windows and also Venetian blinds.

A man entered the room. He was a big man, better than six feet in height, weighing more than two hundred pounds. He was about thirty years old, a handsome blond with blue eyes.

The man was Eddie Keeler, Buzz Hickman's right bower.

Eddie ignored Nick and Joe. He was smiling slightly but his eyes

were somber—even deadly. He took his time looking over the prisoners, obviously trying to frighten them. Kay said, "No need to overplay it, Keeler. We're frightened enough."

Eddie stared at her. "Character, huh? Playin' smart." His eyes narrowed. "Only it ain't smart, see—gettin' me mad."

Kay said, "Why doesn't Buzz Hickman do his own dirty work?"

Keeler said, "One of you killed Zelda Graham. Maybe both. I'm gonna find out for sure."

He signaled with his eyes and Clyde found himself in the iron grip of the big man, Nick. Instinctively he started to fight. He was fairly powerful but he was helpless in Nick's arms.

Joe appeared, holding prepared lengths of rope. In an astonishingly brief space of time they had Clyde bound and tied to a sturdy straight chair.

Clyde didn't know what was coming but he had a pretty good idea. He was thinking about Kay—her safety was what counted. These three hoodlums were tough in the ultimate meaning of the word. He knew they wouldn't have gone this far if they hadn't figured the consequences and determined to carry through.

Eddie stood in front of Clyde, looking down at him. He said, "You ever been worked over, fella? Really worked over?"

Clyde didn't answer.

"It ain't nice," explained Keeler. "It hurts bad. You stand it just so long, then you give in. So I'm askin' you—how will you have it? The easy way or the hard way?"

VIII

Still no response from Clyde.

Suddenly Keeler's right fist flashed out. It caught Clyde high on the cheek. The force of the blow toppled the chair and left him helpless on the floor. He heard Kay's gasp of protest.

Calmly, unemotionally, Nick crossed the room and picked up the chair and Clyde.

Then Clyde started talking. He talked in a low voice but steadily. He said things about Eddie Keeler and he said them graphically.

The big blond stood motionless, trying to shake off the insults. But he was getting more and more out of control. He struck again, and then again. Blood trickled from the corner of Clyde's mouth, an ugly bruise appeared over his right eye.

"Listen at the guy," said Keeler furiously. "Who the hell does he think he is? He's no better'n that tramp he was married to."

Kay said, "All you can get out of this is trouble, Keeler."

"Yeah? That's my lookout. You and this mugg and the cops are trying to pin a bum rap on Buzz Hickman. Well, you ain't gonna get away with it."

He had worked himself into a magnificent fury. "So why should Buzz be the goat? Why should he get railroaded just because a no-good floozie got him loopin' with her fancy talk? You know what Zelda

Graham done to Buzz? Do you know?"

Kay said she didn't.

"She made him think she was solid class. Fancy stuff, knowin' Buzz liked it, knowin' he was a good guy, always tryin' to improve himself. He never seen she wasn't no better'n any other dame, except maybe her price was higher.

"She'd hang around the joint workin' on him, her an' her damned fancy trimmings—her mink coats and snazzy clothes, her jade earrings and bracelets, her gold cigarette case and platinum rings—her fancy words and her ladylike manner . . . or anyhow the manner he thought was the way ladies acted. I tried to tell him, but what did I get? Just a word to keep my mouth shut. He took plenty from her, more'n he ever took from any other woman, or ever would take.

"So then he gets fed up. He breaks off with her and goes back to his own league. But she won't leave him be. She raises hell and gets herself knocked off. And it's fine for the person that done it, on account Buzz is right there, all fixed to be the patsy."

He slapped Clyde twice across the face, first with his palm and then with the back of his hand. "You killed her, Graham—you or this fancy dame of yours. You'd have been charged long ago except they got Buzz to toss to the public. Well, I'm getting a confession out of one of you tonight. That, or you ain't gettin' away from here—not alive. Now whadaya say?"

Clyde said quietly, "You can go to hell."

"Okay, fella—you're still askin' for it."

He struck again and again. Clyde's face was already swollen and bloody. He heard Kay say something and he managed to talk, between blows. He said, "Keep quiet, Kay. I can take it."

She wanted to look away but couldn't. Clyde was being subjected to a brutally scientific beating.

Then came a blow more vicious than the others and Clyde blacked out. When he came to they were sloshing cold water over him. One eye was completely closed. He looked up at his tormentor and said, "Go ahead, Keeler."

The big blond man hesitated. Nick and Joe looked at each other uncertainly. Joe said, "Hell, Eddie—you'll kill the guy."

"So what?"

"So then we'll all be in bad. Nor neither it won't do Buzz no good."

"Also," stated Nick, "this joker ain't gonna confess to no murder. You can see that for yourself."

Eddie Keeler's face got hard and ugly. He said, "He'll talk, all right." He crossed the room in two long steps and grabbed Kay Lambert's wrist. He didn't look at her but at Clyde Graham.

"Now *she's* gonna get what you got, Graham—just a little bit at a time. You can stop it whenever you want." He twisted Kay's wrist, and a spasm of pain crossed her face. She cried out involuntarily. Clyde started to say something but Kay's voice

stopped him. She said, "Let him go ahead, Clyde."

Graham was all mixed up inside. His whole body hurt from the beating to which he'd been subjected. But standing pain or watching the same thing happen to the girl with whom he was in love—those things were different. This he knew he couldn't take.

Keeler had clenched his right fist. Graham knew what that meant. In another few seconds he'd smash it into Kay's face, perhaps disfigure her. The man wasn't bluffing. He'd gone too far to be afraid of going farther.

Clyde said, through swollen lips, "Hold it, Keeler."

"Why?"

"I'll confess to the murder of my wife."

He saw an expression of amazement on Keeler's face, relief in the eyes of Nick and Joe.

"You killed her?" asked Keeler.

"Yes."

"You ain't tryin' to pull no fast one?"

"No."

Kay said sharply, "That's a lie, Keeler. He had nothing to do with Zelda's death."

"She doesn't know anything about it, Keeler." Graham's voice was steady. "When I took Zelda out of the Date Palm she was still drunk and quarrelsome. I had the gun. I shot her."

"Now," said Eddie Keeler, "we're gittin' somewhere."

He got a few sheets of paper. He ripped a fountain pen out of Clyde's pocket. He untied Clyde's right hand.

"Write it down," he said harshly. "Everything. Just how you done it, when you done it, why you done it."

Clyde started to write. Kay protested but no one listened. Then her mind commenced working. She thought she understood what Clyde was doing. Here was a confession being exacted from him under physical duress—it wasn't worth the paper it was written on.

But—and this frightened her—that might not hold water because Clyde was already a suspect. The police believed he had killed his wife. They knew he'd had motive and opportunity. They might believe that this confession had been forced from him but they might also believe the confession.

Clyde wrote steadily. He signed his name and handed the paper to Eddie Keeler. "That all right?" he asked.

Keeler read it and nodded. "Okay," he said. "See you in San Quentin."

At his orders, Nick and Joe released Clyde Graham. Clyde walked somewhat unsteadily across the room and into a guest bath beyond a partly open door. He washed his bloody and swollen face. He ran a comb through his hair and adjusted his clothes. When he emerged he looked better but still terrible. For perhaps half a minute he stood staring at the man who had beaten him. Eddie fidgeted and cursed.

Kay crossed the room and put her

hand on Clyde's arm. She said, "Let's go, dear."

He walked out of the house with her. She took the wheel of the car and drove slowly toward his apartment. He fumbled for a cigarette and lighted it. Then Kay started to talk.

"That confession won't hold water, Clyde."

He didn't answer.

"Lieutenant Walsh will see how you look. He'll believe your story about being beaten by Keeler. It will probably satisfy Walsh that Buzz Hickman is guilty, else he wouldn't have gone to such desperate lengths. And Keeler will be charged with kidnapping."

Still Clyde didn't talk, and Kay said, "Does it hurt terribly, darling?"

"I'm all right." Then he said, "How is your wrist?"

"He didn't hurt me, really."

"He *would* have."

"Yes." She drove another mile in silence. Then she said, "I'd heard of things like this. Until tonight I never quite believed them."

He still wasn't talking nor did he talk when she finally got him into his own apartment. She made him stretch out on the couch and then she brought warm damp towels to cleanse his wounds and ointment to soothe them. She suggested calling a doctor but he said no.

His attitude worried her. She got up and walked around his apartment, opening drawers and cabinets. He said, "What are you looking for?"

"A gun," she replied curtly.

"Why?" His voice sounded cold.

"You might get the idea of going after Keeler."

He said, "There's no gun here."

She seated herself beside him on the couch. She bent over and kissed his bruised lips. She said, "I'm not trusting you, Clyde. I'm staying here with you."

He didn't protest, didn't argue. That was what frightened her. She remained close to him, talking gently, affectionately, trying to rouse him from whatever it was that was preying on his mind. Shortly after dawn she sent him into the bathroom to change and shower. She heard him trying to shave too but he didn't have much luck with it.

She fixed breakfast and they ate it together. He drank several cups of coffee and sipped a little orange juice but he didn't eat. She wasn't hungry either—but she made an effort. Anything to establish an atmosphere of normalcy.

Afterward he sat in a club chair and she curled up on his lap. The California sun streamed in through the window. The day was gay and bright and her fears should long since have vanished. But they hadn't.

She said, "You know how much I love you, don't you, Clyde?"

His arm tightened.

She said, "Try to snap out of it, sweetheart. What you did was sensible. You took everything he gave you. You signed that ridiculous paper to save me."

He wasn't thinking about her words. He was thinking about the

courage she had shown the previous night, the courage she was showing now, the many sides of her nature—the sides no other person could ever see.

They remained in Clyde's apartment all morning, waiting for the summons they knew must come. Kay telephoned Lambert Motors to explain that she and Mr. Graham had been detained.

At two o'clock Marty Walsh called. His voice sounded tight and worried. He said, "A friend of yours is down here, Graham?"

Clyde said, "Who?"

"Eddie Keeler. He brought me some readin' matter."

"Yes."

"You write it, Graham?"

"Yes."

"Shall I come get you or will you come down?"

"I'll come down."

"Can you bring Miss Lambert with you?"

"Yes. She's here now."

"Drive right into the City Hall garage. I'll leave word with the man at the door."

The ride downtown wasn't pleasant. Worry gnawed at Kay. There was something going on in Clyde's mind she knew nothing about and didn't understand. Obviously there was something preying on him, something more important than the beating he had taken the night before.

They reached the City Hall and walked up the winding fire steps to the long corridor with the *Police Department* sign on the wall. They entered room 42. Vic Tremont was there, waiting. He blinked at sight of Clyde's face and conducted them into the Skipper's office.

IX

Room 43 was crowded. Captain Carnes was sitting at his desk. Marty Walsh was standing near the door.

Buzz Hickman was seated in a straight chair. Near him was Madge Walton. Jimmy Lambert stood in a corner, near an ornate calendar advertising the sympathetic and efficient services of a mortician. Lined against the wall were Eddie Keeler, Nick Scalotti and Joe Hanlon. Eddie's eyes were still evil, still unafraid. Clyde did no more than glance at him as Marty Walsh brought a chair for Kay. He remained standing.

Walsh said, "Keeler really worked you over, didn't he, Graham?"

"Yes."

"*He* ain't marked up. How come?"

"I was tied to a chair."

"He made you sign a paper, didn't he, confessing you'd killed your wife?"

"Yes."

"It ain't worth a damn. You signed under duress."

Clyde Graham said steadily. "It's good enough, Marty."

"What?"

"Keeler beat it out of me. But it's still true."

The silence in the room was almost tangible. From somewhere Kay's voice said, *"No!"* but Walsh motioned her to silence.

The air was electric with excite-

ment. Walsh, groping for words to conceal his amazement, said, "You mean . . . ?"

"I killed Zelda," stated Clyde Graham flatly. "In exactly the way that confession states."

Walsh said, "Who do you think you're kidding, Graham?"

"I'm not kidding anybody—least of all myself. You should like it, Marty. You had that idea to begin with."

Lieutenant Walsh was frowning. He said, "It doesn't add." Clyde shrugged and said nothing.

Buzz Hickman looked puzzled. Then he turned to Walsh. "I guess that washes it up—eh, Marty?"

"I suppose so." Walsh wasn't too happy. Maybe, reflected Kay, that was because he hadn't expected to get it this way. He sat motionless when Buzz Hickman got up, some of his vaunted self-assurance restored. Eddie Keeler moved close to Clyde and said, "What kind of a fast one you tryin' to pull?"

Clyde looked at him, saying nothing.

"There's somethin' wrong here," insisted Keeler. "He's coverin' for somebody."

"What makes you think that?" inquired Walsh.

"The way he talked last night. The way he kept his lip buttoned when I worked him over. Hell, I know you can throw the book at me for what I done—but so long as I'm in this deep I'd like to hear some truth."

"Who would he be covering for?"

"Miss Lambert—or her brother."

Clyde said steadily, "I told you I killed Zelda."

"An' I say you're lying." Eddie Keeler turned to Marty Walsh. "What kind of a cop are you, lettin' him get away with this?"

Marty asked, "You don't really think he killed his wife?"

"No. He ain't acting natural. He's covering."

Clyde turned slowly. His face still looked like a mess and he wasn't too steady on his feet. He looked at Buzz Hickman. He said, "You're satisfied, aren't you, Buzz?"

Hickman nodded. "Hell, yes. Anything that clears me is swell."

Clyde had taken over. No one had asked him to but no one tried to stop him. He again addressed himself to Hickman. "I confessed," he said, "so you're happy. But everybody in this room isn't happy, Hickman."

Buzz was out of his depth. He said, "That's double-talk, Graham."

"No it isn't. Do you know who isn't happy, Hickman? Do you know who doesn't want my confession to stick?"

"Who?"

Clyde drew a deep breath. He said, "The person who really murdered Zelda—Eddie Keeler."

For a few seconds there was silence. Then Keeler's voice boomed out, "That's a lie."

Walsh said quietly, "You been throwin' a lot of curves, Graham. What's the idea now?"

Clyde said, "I've been pretty sure ever since last night that the man you wanted was Keeler. But you

wouldn't have believed me. You had to see for yourself."

"All right—I'll bite. What have I seen?"

"Just now, when I stated that my confession was true, regardless of how it had been obtained, *who* objected? Who was it that insisted I was pulling a fast one?"

Buzz Hickman walked across the room and stood in front of Clyde. He still looked debonair but there was a light behind his eyes that was dangerous. He said, "You're talkin' pretty good, fella. Spread it out a little."

Graham glanced at Marty Walsh. The detective was permitting this amazing situation to run under its own steam.

"All right, Hickman"—that was Clyde talking—"let's get a few things straight. You hold top spot in the rackets out here. If anything happened to you—like a murder conviction, perhaps—who would take your place?"

"Eddie Keeler."

"Certainly. And that's what your friend Keeler wanted. That's why he wasn't happy when I stated that my confession was true. He didn't want it to be. Furthermore, he *knew* it wasn't."

"You louse!" That was Keeler. "Just because I beat you up . . ."

Tremont silenced the big blond man and Clyde Graham went right on talking. "Keeler didn't want it to be me. He was scatter-shooting when he said it was probably Miss Lambert or her brother. You know why? Because he wanted the detectives to keep on wondering. And the more they wondered the more it would have to be you, Hickman."

Walsh said, "It still doesn't make sense."

"It does when you analyze it, Marty. That beating last night was a show. Keeler murdered Zelda, intending to have Hickman take the rap. Then he'd move into Buzz's shoes. All the time Buzz would be thinking what a good-friend Keeler had been. Reckless, perhaps, and even foolish—but loyal.

"Keeler knew that the confession he got from me last night wasn't worth a nickel. But having got it in the presence of his two hoodlums he had to turn it over to you. You were bound to call me. I'd come down and repudiate it. You'd be right back where you were—uncertain. And the longer you stayed uncertain, the more positive it was that eventually you'd pick Buzz Hickman as your prime suspect.

"I wanted you to see for yourself that Keeler didn't like anybody as the guilty person—except Hickman. Not me or Miss Lambert or Madge Walton or Jimmy. I made my play fast. He was caught off guard. He's stupid anyway—he didn't have time to think that one out. All he knew was that things were going wrong. His sole motive in killing Zelda was to hang it on Hickman."

Hickman's voice, smooth as silk and dangerous as cyanide, broke in. "The more you talk, Graham, the better I like it. Keep goin'."

Graham faced Marty Walsh. "Tell me one thing, Lieutenant—

did you like the hairs and the piece of fabric you found in the back of my car where Zelda's body was?"

Walsh smiled. "You ain't missin' any tricks, are you, Son? No, I didn't like 'em."

"Why?"

"The hairs belonged to Buzz. So did the fabric. They could of been grabbed off him if Zelda had struggled—in the car. But there was every sign that she was killed outside the car and her body thrown in afterward. It was too cute—it fitted too neat."

Hickman walked over to Keeler and stood looking up at him. He said with deadly calm, "For your sake, Eddie, I hope you get the gas chamber. I hope you never have another free minute. Because if you ever do, what will happen to you will make San Quentin look like a Sunday School picnic."

Walsh said, "You go for it being Keeler, Buzz?"

"It's got to be. Though I still don't understand how Graham doped it out."

Marty said, "Neither do I."

Clyde said, "It wasn't anything you overlooked, Lieutenant. It was something you didn't know—something you wouldn't have believed if I'd told you.

"Zelda always wanted me to give her a gold cigarette case. While we were living together, before the original divorce proceedings, that was something I couldn't afford. In recent months my financial position has improved.

"When Zelda came to our table that night she saw the gold cigarette case I'd given Miss Lambert when we got engaged. It infuriated her. She grabbed it and still had it when I walked her outside.

"Later that night, Marty, when Miss Lambert and I discovered Zelda's body in the back of my car, we found the cigarette case there too. It was Kay's—Miss Lambert's. Her initials were on it. I insisted Kay keep it, because at that time I thought there'd be some chance of saving her from being too deeply involved.

"Zelda never owned such a case. Louie, the bartender, told you that during the evening, when Zelda was at the bar, she bought a pack of cigarettes and was smoking them from the pack. You can check with him that she had no cigarette case at that time.

"But the murderer didn't know her well enough for that. He didn't know where, when or how she came into possession of it. She probably still had it in her hand when he killed her. He picked it up and tossed it on top of her body, thinking—naturally—it was hers."

Keeler said, "That still don't tie it to me."

"Yes it does. Because last night, when you were whipping yourself into enough of a rage to work me over, you gave yourself away. You were describing Zelda. You spoke about her mink coat, her bracelets, her earrings. And you specifically mentioned her gold cigarette case! You mentioned something that she'd

never had except for the few minutes between the time she left my table and the time she was murdered."

He paused, breathed deeply, made a fresh start. "You see, Marty—the motive wasn't love or jealousy or money—or even a young man trying to protect his sister. It was Eddie Keeler's ambition to take over the West Coast rackets at Hickman's expense. That's why he didn't want me to be the killer. For his purposes it had to be Hickman. Are you satisfied?"

Marty nodded. He said, "Nice goin', Graham." Then he turned casually to Vic Tremont. "Who else is on duty?" he asked.

Tremont rattled off a list of names.

"Pick three or four of 'em. Maybe if we have a confidential talk with Mr. Keeler in the Yes-room we can induce him to co-operate."

Fear dawned in Eddie Keeler's eyes. He started to protest but Buzz Hickman's fist flashed out and caught him on the mouth. No one interfered. "Work him over, Marty," snapped Buzz. "He'll talk. He's yellow."

Marty turned to Clyde Graham. "You want in on this, Graham? You got it comin'."

Clyde shook his head. He moved close to Kay and took her hand. From behind him he heard Eddie Keeler begin babbling a confession.

Clyde and Kay Lambert left the City Hall together. He was at the wheel. They cut across town to Olympic and turned west. Clyde drove slowly. She reached out one hand and put it over his. She said, "I was proud of you."

"I was lucky, darling." He tried to smile, but it still sat crookedly on his bruised lips. "That's over," he said. "There's nothing more to worry us."

"Except getting married," Kay answered. "That's when your troubles will really start, dear."

To a lot of young people, merely being in Manhattan is dream-fulfillment. To a lot more, being well on the road to success in your chosen career in Manhattan is almost beyond the candlepower of dreaming. However, things are almost never as good as they look from the outside. For instance, the young illustrator-protagonist of Philip Wylie's fine short novel, IT COULDN'T BE MURDER, was a thoroughly wretched young man—and it wasn't merely the heat.

He had the misfortune to be in love. Worse, his love was one of the few remaining American girls whose family was so rich and important that it considered any sort of artist, however successful, beneath contempt and said so. So when its male members began to drop dead—one, two, three—our hero found himself in a rough spot. Look for it in our next issue.

case of the rival familiars

by
Clarence Budington Kelland

Lots of people have sought a happy medium—but few, like Alpin Stone, discover a corpse in the bathtub.

ONE may live next door to a man for a dozen years without discovering more interesting facts concerning him than that he wears woolen underwear, is an abominable gardener, plays a mediocre hand of bridge and is dominated by his wife. Then of a sudden some event occurs which presents him to you as an intricate and fascinating personality, whereupon you regret your failure to have made the most of the dozen years during which you might have cultivated him and enriched your life by observation of his peculiar genius.

It was so with Alpin Stone. He owned the unpretentious home next to my own and we were something more than acquaintances though less than friends. I knew he was proprietor of a considerable business in books—secondhand books of all sorts, particularly rare editions, which he kept in a fireproof vault at the rear of his store.

He has invited me to inspect these treasures but I have never availed myself of the opportunity, my literary taste running more to the tabloids and to works dealing with building materials and their uses. Indeed I have written exten-

The works of Clarence Budington Kelland are truly legion, and so celebrated as to need no further introduction here. However, what is not generally known today is that, more than thirty years ago, the creator of Scattergood Baines brought all of his craft and humor to a fascinating series of detective stories revolving about the bizarre Alpin Stone and his crime index. This is the first of the Alpin Stones.

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sively of my experiments with concrete and from this practice grows any facility in self-expression I may possess.

Mr. Stone was not a person who would draw a second glance on the street unless he chanced to remove his hat. His hair was of that tightly curling variety sometimes topping statues of Greek gods. I make this comparison because I have attempted a number of times to produce replicas of famous sculptures in concrete.

Aside from his peculiarity of his hair and its reddish-gray color and abundance, his appearance was in no way arresting. He was of moderate height and had acquired no more pronounced abdomen than is decent in a man verging upon fifty.

I fancied, as a neighbor will, that I knew Alpin Stone thoroughly for a decent prompt methodical man whose weakness lay in preferring to acquire a rare book for the shelves of his somewhat dingy store than in finding a customer who would purchase one at a profit. My undervaluation was grotesque.

My real acquaintance with Mr. Stone commenced upon a May afternoon when I was working in my garden. As I worked I could see him through the dividing wire fence and noted how he was setting out tomato plants in his usual reprehensible manner. I have expostulated with him upon the subject of tomatoes for many years. I remember I was measuring with a folding rule to establish the exact and appropriate distance between projected rows of peas when a female voice immediately behind me uttered an incoherent cry of terror.

I turned and saw a young woman, evidently a servant of foreign birth, rushing toward me. *"Oh! Oh! Oh!"* she cried. 'Over there—over there . . ." She pointed a pudgy forefinger at a house across the street and I saw that its door was standing open.

"What's over there?" I asked. "Stop shrieking and tell me what's wrong."

"In the tub," she said, and threw herself upon the ground, covering her face with her apron.

"What tub?" said I.

"I have a notion she means the bathtub," said Alpin Stone, who had approached and was leaning over the fence.

The girl continued to utter hysterical sounds and I could get no coherent explanation out of her nor would she describe what had frightened her save to say that she had opened the door and *it* was in the tub and she ran out.

"Perhaps," said Alpin Stone, "We'd better look." He touched the girl's shoulder. "Come show us," he said and led the way. She came along docilely enough but sniffling in a most disturbing manner. We entered the vestibule and proceeded into the hall.

"Upstairs," said the girl.

We mounted to the second floor and then proceeded to what I took to be the owner's bedroom, a large

apartment containing a four-poster and other pieces which I hastily judged to be antiques. A door at the end stood ajar and toward this the girl made gestures.

Alpin Stone opened the door slowly to a distance sufficient to admit his head. For a moment he stared and then he pushed the door wide. I could see a bathroom with floor and wall of white tiling and, over the edge of the tub, the back of a man's head. It lopped to the right in a most unsightly manner.

Alpin Stone was now standing beside the tub, studying its occupant. I took my place at his side and beheld a man I judged to be about thirty-five, unclothed and obviously dead. Stone pointed to the young man's right temple, where I saw nauseating evidence of the manner of his death. He had been struck by some heavy object with a rounded surface.

"Who is he?" Stone asked of the maid, who was peering apprehensively through the door.

"I don't know. I never see him before."

"Do you work here?"

"Yes."

"This is not your employer?"

"No. He go away for two week, and the missis."

"How long have they been gone?"

"Five day."

"Leaving you alone?"

"Yes."

"This man was not a guest in the house?"

"No—no! I never see him. He is never here. I go out las' night to dance and this morning I clean the house. I see him here. Then I run out."

"Do you mean to say," I demanded, "that this man is a stranger in this house—that he has never been a guest of your employers? It's incredible!"

"Nothing is incredible," said Alpin Stone. "Where are his clothes?"

I looked in the adjoining room. No clothing was there nor, though I searched each room on that floor, was there a garment belonging to the man.

"I can find no clothes whatever," I told Alpin Stone.

"Murdered in a strange house—no clothes," he said to himself.

"It's absurd."

"It's remarkable," said Alpin Stone.

"We must notify the police," said I.

"Presently, presently. Did you notice the contents of the wash-bowl, Junkins?"

I looked in the bowl and found it to contain a glass ball about the size of a choice grapefruit.

"The weapon," said I.

"Possibly," said Alpin, "but rather more than a mere weapon. It adds a bizarre quality to this crime."

"I don't understand," said I, genuinely puzzled.

"Without that glass ball we would have an interesting crime, certainly, but one whose characteristics were only those of unusual human cleverness. The presence of

the ball indicates the presence of the occult, the intervention of the supernatural, either genuine or spurious. Of course the glass may be merely fortuitous. That can be ascertained from the maid."

He lifted the globe from the washbowl and stepped into the bedroom, where he displayed it to the servant. "Have you ever seen this about the house?" he asked.

"No. I have not see."

"Do you know what it is?"

She shook her head.

"You are sure your master or mistress never made use of this object?"

"I never see it. It come with that man."

"What is the thing?" I asked and Alpin Stone looked at me with ill concealed disgust.

"A crystal—a gazing-crystal," he said. "History fails to record a time so remote that crystals such as this were not used to peer into the future by seers or mediums."

"Surely you don't credit such nonsense," said I.

"I am not a gullible man, Junkins. I am moved by facts. To be able to prove a thing is a sort of passion with me. I am forced to confess that the preponderance of available evidence favors the crystal side of it."

"What then?" said I.

"It means we are likely to encounter strange and twisted motives in this matter. We may meet with human beings actuated by reasons incomprehensible to the normal man—urged on by malignant forces at whose very existence the police would scoff."

"It is my observation that the police recognize four primary motives—greed, revenge, fear, jealousy. All acts must spring from one of these." He shrugged his shoulders. "I have known a man murdered by a *thought*, as surely murdered as if with a knife, and the motive was—curiosity."

Stone replaced the crystal in the washbowl. "Suppose you telephone the police while I look about," he suggested and I felt rather better for doing so. It regularized our position or so it seemed to me.

Presently Alpin Stone came downstairs and we seated ourselves on the porch to await the officials. He lighted a cigar and then said in the manner of a man who makes a most ordinary observation, "Nothing ever happens that has not happened before either in fact or in some one's imagination.

"I doubt if a thing can happen which you will not find duplicated, making allowance for the conditions of the period of the world's history, in some book or biography, of actual history, or in fiction. I prefer fiction. Imagination is more accurate than actuality.

"What I mean, Junkins, is that if a man read and remembered every book of fiction in the world he would undoubtedly be able to unravel any puzzle of human conduct without difficulty. He would find his premises duplicated somewhere and would have to recall only

how the author reached a solution to his problem."

"Possibly," said I.

"Certainly," said he dogmatically. "Somewhere in the literature of this world is a condition analogous to the one we have met in this house—of a complete stranger, naked, in a house with which he has no connection whatever along with the attendant presence of the occult. But I fail to recall it. However," he said with an air of modesty, "I have not read *everything*."

"It would be impossible," said I.

"Still," said he, "I have tried to read every book in which a crime is mentioned or to have some dependable reader make a brief of the outstanding characteristics of the crime described. You have never seen my index?" he asked tentatively.

"Never," said I.

"You will not mention it to my wife," said he. "It distresses her." He smiled whimsically. "She regards me as a sort of drug-addict. I even suspect her of putting things in my coffee to break the habit."

"What habit, Mr. Stone?"

"The abominable and degrading habit of meddling with fascinating crimes," he said, "and endeavoring to solve by the application of my theory mysteries which are beyond the somewhat limited powers of the regular police. My index . . ."

"Your index," said I, as he paused.

"Is, I flatter myself, a nearly complete and practical record of criminal plots, both actual and fictional. Minutely classified and with ample cross-references. For instance, I can readily select from recorded crimes those whose feature is the finding of the body of the victim in a naked state. From this large number I can eliminate, by following down my cross-references and selecting only cases where the body was found in an unusual and incredible place.

"The appearance of the occult will eliminate still others and so on, narrowing the scope of the inquiry until I discover one or more plots closely comparable to the problem in hand. Then I have only to apply the determined solution to the mystery. It is merely putting to practical use the aphorism that there is nothing new under the sun."

Twenty minutes later two men, whose appearance indicated very limited mental capacity, made their appearance and greeted Alpin Stone with some surprise. They addressed him by name and were evidently old acquaintances. He introduced them as Detectives Samuels and Roush.

"How come you here ahead of us?" asked Roush.

"Accident—pure accident. I live across the street."

"Huh! When I seen you I says to Ed that we was up against a puzzler or you wouldn't be here. Glad it ain't so."

"I'm afraid it is so—or at least it seems puzzling to me. It may not appear so to the greater experience of you gentlemen."

"Huh!" said Ed Samuels, eyeing

Alpin Stone as if he suspected veiled sarcasm. "Where is *it?*"

"Upstairs in the bathtub," said Alpin Stone with what seemed to me a certain callousness.

The detectives tramped noisily into the house and Alpin Stone smiled after them quizzically.

"Here's what they'll do," he said. "Their first move will be to suspect the servant-girl or possibly her sweetheart. Motive, jealousy. The murdered man comes to visit the servant-girl in the absence of her employers. Her sweetheart discovers he is being deceived and murders the Lothario. Then he carries off the clothes to prevent identification. You'll see. When that fails they'll try to connect the victim with the people who live here. Who are they, by the way?"

"I believe the name is Wiggins," said I. "They bought the place very recently."

"Our friends upstairs will refuse to credit the obvious. No amount of evidence will convince them that the dead man is not connected with somebody who lives here. A number of innocent people are going to be put to the annoyance of proving themselves innocent. These fellows tickle me, they're so consistent."

Another individual, who asserted with considerable importance that he was the coroner, arrived upon the heels of the detectives.

He treated the officers with scorn and they replied with contempt, to the great amusement of Alpin Stone, who appeared to enjoy even the inquisition to which we were subjected by all three official persons. When they had gone, taking with them a very frightened servant-girl—to be detained as a material witness—Alpin Stone got up from his seat, chuckling aloud.

Then suddenly Stone manifested one of the peculiarities which I was thereafter to associate with his personality. He seemed to drop me out of his consciousness, to forget my existence utterly. Without a word or a glance he turned abruptly and walked away from me at a rapid pace.

As may be imagined I watched the newspapers with keen interest. The account of the finding of the body, gathered by reporters at police headquarters, was passably accurate. At the hour of going to press there had been no identification of the victim nor were the morning papers able to state who or what the dead man had been.

Apparently nobody was missing nor had any individual come forward to claim acquaintance with the dead man and his antecedents. This condition persisted on the following day and all through the day succeeding. The affair, possessing characteristics of an unusual and mysterious nature, excited public interest to a degree. But the curiosity of the public remained unsatisfied by the production of a single clue.

Though I lay in wait for Alpin Stone I did not see him until the

evening of the third day when, with an abruptness which I found rather disconcerting, he stood under my dining-room window and called my name lustily. I went out to him immediately, leaving untouched a dessert of which I am especially fond.

"Are you afraid of ghosts?" he said without preliminaries.

"I don't believe they exist," said I indignantly.

"H'm!" he said in a tone which irritated me somewhat. "Are you still interested in the gentleman we found?"

"Very much so," said I.

"Get your hat," he said hurriedly.

I did so. "Where are we going?"

"To visit some creatures whose existence you deny."

"Ghosts?"

"Ghosts, spirits, occult manifestations—whatever you choose to call them. By the way did you ever chance to notice how rare it is for psychics to marry psychics? Or for two sisters, or two brothers, or a brother and sister to be psychic?"

"No."

"One medium to a family seems the rule," he said. "We are going to call upon a family which boasts two mediums—husband and wife—the only family of the sort in our city. I have consumed three days in determining that."

"Surely," said I, "you don't plan to solve this mystery by consulting some charlatan?"

"Junkins," said he, "I'd consult Balaam's ass if I thought I could get anything out of him."

We rode across town for half an hour, alighting at a mean street of untidy narrow lots, occupied by frowzy houses. It possessed a sinister aspect, though perhaps this was a product of my imagination, urged to activity by my notions of the characters who deluded the credulous by apocryphal dealings with the non-existent.

Alpin Stone had not spoken since we set forth nor had I sought to intrude upon his absorption. He seemed a man possessed by some gleeful familiar. It was not the anticipation a man permits himself in contemplating some approaching pleasure, like an excellent meal. It was rather the somewhat reprehensible glee of a drug-addict whose craving is about to be satiated.

We paused before a two-story frame house numbered One Hundred and Six. It was a furtive house, for houses possess character as well as individuals. It was a house that peered slyly at you when your eyes were turned. Its windows recalled to me the eyes of Napoleon III, which were said to have secondary lids capable of being dropped to conceal what the pupils might reveal.

Alpin Stone sighed as I imagine some opium-addict might sigh at the moment of drawing into his lungs the fumes of the debasing drug. He removed his hat and his great shock of tight-curling red hair seemed endowed with independent life. It was a phenomenon I was to witness many times but I have never been able to account for it.

Perhaps the mental excitement under which he labored caused his scalp to quiver. At any rate it was disconcerting. He pulled the bell.

A woman opened the door. She did not fulfil my preconceived ideas of the personality of a medium, for she was tiny and not without remnants of a certain daintiness. Her age might have been forty although she may have been younger, for there was a look about her at once strained and weary, which added to her years.

"Mrs. Bolero?" asked Alpin Stone.

The woman nodded. Her attitude was defensive.

"My name is Stone," said he. "I am recommended to you by Andrew McTosh."

Her inhospitable expression altered somewhat. "Mr. McTosh sent you to me—or to my husband?"

"To you," said Alpin Stone.

"That's queer," she said to herself, ignoring our presence. "To *me!* McTosh knows how *she* interferes."

"I beg your pardon?" said Stone.

"Come in," she said. "I'll see what I can do. I—there are influences which thwart me."

I was mildly astonished at her use of that word and gazed at her with even greater interest. I saw what I had not noted before—that the look in her eyes was one of suppressed terror. And somehow I knew her fear was not of anything material.

"Come in," she said.

"Is *he* at home?" asked Alpin.

"No. He may not return for an hour."

Alpin nodded. He appeared to understand something hidden from me and followed the woman into a room which was set in the middle of the house—a dim murky room with heavy air and a single shaded window.

It contained a round table and chairs and against the wall stood a sort of cabinet—a thing I took to be a makeshift photographer's dark room, for it was draped to the floor with curtains of black. It was an uncomfortable apartment and the short hairs at the back of my neck rose in protest.

I am called a hard-headed man by my friends and am not as a rule imposed upon readily. It is my belief that the dead are dead. I am not yet shaken in this belief, yet there were occurrences in that room which I shall never be able to explain even to myself.

To these occurrences I was a witness through both eyes and ears and I am compelled to admit that forces were abroad that day which have no equivalent in human knowledge and which held for me such dread and horror as I hope never again to experience. If there is such a thing as malignancy, in the sense that there is steam or electricity, then I have touched its essence.

We seated ourselves at the table, Alpin Stone opposite Mrs. Bolero and I at one side. Stone leaned his crooked-handled walking-stick against his knee.

"What do you want of me?" asked Mrs. Bolero.

"I wish you to hold my hand," said Alpin Stone, "while I gaze into the crystal. It is only by that means I am enabled to see."

"But I have no crystal," she said in a strange voice.

"I have brought my own," said Alpin Stone and he placed a ball of clear glass upon the table between them. "Your power must pass through your hand to me. By contact with your fingers your control becomes my control. You have done this before."

"Yes," she said and as she extended her hand toward Alpin Stone I saw that it was very small, of a peculiar unhealthy white, and trembling as if from some disease of the nerves.

The hands of Alpin Stone and Mrs. Bolero clasped and there was silence. Then, by degrees and gradually, rather than with any sudden radiance, the crystal began to glow, beginning at its heart, until it became a ball of light. In its radiance I could see other matters indistinctly, tiny forms which had the semblance of human figures.

To my eyes they were nebulous and incoherent. But not so with Alpin Stone, as I could perceive by the fixing of his eyes and the stiffening of his features. That he perceived something of moment to him I could not doubt but upon that matter he has maintained a reserve which I have never been able to penetrate. On that afternoon Alpin Stone saw matters in the crystal which were for him alone and which he has locked forever in his breast.

Nor was this glowing of the crystal all that I saw or felt. There was a stirring of the air, not as of a draft, for the room was tight and the door and window closed, but rather as if the air were stirred by the passage of something which fanned it into waves. I felt it passing through my hair and touching my face.

Distinctly I felt some material thing draw across my back and turning in apprehension I saw that the curtains of the black cabinet bellying like the sails of some ship before a trade-wind. It was they that had touched me. Then a door at the rear of the house slammed loudly.

Almost instantly I heard a sort of shriek. Let me be honest and accurate. I cannot to this day tell whether I *heard* that sound or *felt* it. But the sound was there. It was not a cry of grief or pain but a sound which I can compare only to that of some merciless cat-thing enraged. It seemed as if all the hate and jealousy and malignancy of the world had been collected and expressed in that shriek.

Terror sank into the marrow of my bones and I would have started to my feet and fled the place but an insupportable weight held me fast. Mrs. Bolero uttered a moan of pain and as I live I saw upon the side of her face, from the corner of the eye to the point of the jaw, four livid marks such as nothing can

cause except the clawing nails of some venomous woman.

A chair crashed to the floor as if thrown by a violent hand. The air was full of a sobbing screech as of a woman in the control of hysterical rage. I saw objects move with none to move them—but most evil of all the evils was my knowledge that I was engulfed in hate, submerged by and battling a tide of malignancy which filled the room as compressed air fills the chamber in which workmen tunnel under a river.

I felt a presence behind me, a weight against my shoulders as of some one leaning upon and over me, and I saw a long lean arm with a great claw at the end of it extend over the table and snatch up the crystal into which Alpin Stone was gazing. At the same instant a damp cold claw made up of sinewy fingers crushed my throat.

What followed I saw through a film of horror. Alpin Stone uttered a bellow. He seized the walking-stick ready to his hand and, leaping to his feet, reached across the table and over my head with the crook-handle of it. And then I was thrown forward by a wriggling struggling howling weight, as a heavy body was jerked down and over me.

"Grab him—*quick!*" shouted Alpin Stone and with the reflex action which is at the root of self-preservation I writhed from under the body and pounced upon it.

It was no disembodied spirit with which we struggled, but a man of flesh and blood, who cursed and slavered until we fought him into subjection and bound him and left him lying with his face upon the table. Then Alpin Stone drew a long breath.

"A near thing," he said.

"He choked me," said I pointlessly.

"He was about to brain you with the crystal," said Alpin calmly.

Mrs. Bolero crouched in her chair, moaning. Alpin Stone touched her shoulder gently. "You are well out of it," he said.

"He's not to blame. It isn't his fault."

"I know," said Alpin. "We'll see what we can do—if you can explain it."

"That woman—Hildegarde. She hates me. She hates Adeline. It's jealousy. It's not my husband—it's that woman."

"Hildegarde is his control?"

"Yes."

"And Adeline?"

"She is my control. She's sweet and kind—and beautiful. That's why Hildegarde hates her. Hildegard is bad, wicked. But mostly it is jealousy."

"Yes?"

"It has been growing worse. At first it showed in little things and then it began to terrify me. If somebody consulted Adeline Hildegarde went into a rage. She can't bear to see Adeline get attention. And my husband had no control over her. It was the other way. She worked upon him until she possessed him—and compelled him

as she wanted to. It's been getting worse and worse until . . ."

"Last Thursday night," said Alpin Stone.

"You know?" The woman said it without emotion.

"I know but I don't understand everything. Why did she kill him?"

"I think," said Mrs. Bolero, "that she was in love with him. He came here often for a long time back. At first he was my husband's client. He doesn't live in the city," she added, "but used to come to visit and stay in the house for days at a time. We kept a room for him. Once, when my husband was away, he consulted Adeline."

"That was two months ago," she went on, "and he deserted Hildegarde for Adeline. He would have nothing more to do with her. And then things began to happen. Oh, you can't know the awfulness of it! She hates Adeline!"

"I know. Go on."

"Last week he came and took the room we have for him, and Thursday he kept an appointment with Adeline. He used to gaze into the crystal as you did today."

Alpin Stone nodded.

"Hildegarde came in a rage. She terrified me. It was impossible to calm her. Then something happened—I don't know what but I fear. It was dark. I heard a blow and *he* was snatched out of this room. That's the truth. I fainted. He was snatched away—and I don't know how but I'm afraid."

"She used your husband, of course," said Alpin Stone in a matter-of-fact way. "What was this man's name?"

"Jason Overbury. He lived—" She named a little town fifty miles distant.

"That's why there has been no identification," Alpin said to me. "He was not expected to return to his home and so was not missed. He was unknown here. Probably came secretly to consult the occult."

"But how and why came he to be naked in that bathtub?" I asked.

Alpin laughed. "That maid—though the police never could discover the connection. She couldn't discover it herself, poor creature. She's a niece of Bolero's. He had to hide the body—a pressing necessity to a murderer, even when he kills at the command of an immaterial lady.

"Bolero knew the employers of his niece were absent, knew she was at a dance that night. It was a capable plan and would have succeeded beautifully but for myself. He put the body into a small car he owns and covered it with a robe. It was an easy matter, in the dead of night, to carry it into the house, using the key his niece concealed under the doormat.

"It was not a common trait of mind that led Bolero to place the body in the tub but it was effective—added to the peculiarity of the circumstances. He removed the clothes to make identification more difficult and for another reason—to mystify. There is a distinct type of mind whose genius is to create

mystifications. The clothes were burned in the furnace."

"But why did he take the crystal?"

"To please Hildegarde," said Alpin Stone soberly. "She hated the sight of it. Her rival used it to wean this Jason Overbury away from her—don't you see?"

"How," said I, "did you connect Bolero with the crime?"

"Because," he said, "he was the only male medium in town who had another medium for his wife."

"I don't follow you," said I.

"Light the lamp so you can see to read," he said. "It was good fortune mainly. I chanced to have the key. I told you there was no new thing under the sun. I searched my index, which if not complete is extensive.

"By running down cross-references I came at last upon an interesting old story, an obscure thing whose very author is unknown. I made a copy in case you are interested." He handed me a typewritten sheet. I read the following—

Now there lived in the Kingdom of the Isles a wizard of parts who took to wife a certain sorceress who gazed into the crystal and foretold what events might befall to king, or knight, or lady. And this wizard, Knight Gawain of the Black Cavern, and his wife, Renée, had each of them a familiar spirit, maidens, who took shape and appeared before them, and the familiar of Renée was very fair and beautiful to see, while the familiar of Gawain of the Black Cavern was black and ugly and vilely disposed.

And there rode into the Castle of the Black Cavern a certain young knight of prowess, that wished to tamper with magic for furthering his love of a certain lady, and he did consult with Gawain of the Black Cavern, who worked divers spells and incantations.

But again he came, and Gawain was absent, but Renée was present, and he made petition to her, and she did give him his way of it and held consultation with *her* familiar, to the end that the familiar of Gawain, her husband, was wroth and filled with bile and great jealousy, and so commanded Gawain that he slay the young knight, which Gawain did treacherously.

And then, because he had fear, for that the young knight was of the company of the Round Table, he thought to conceal his villainy, and therefore he removed from the young knight his armor and devices and every article of clothing, and carried him, sewed up in a sack, to a neighboring castle, whereof the owner was absent upon a quest, and there, in that strange place, did Gawain bestow the young knight naked, and place at his side the gazing-crystal wherewith he had slain him. And but for the wisdom and wizardry of Merlin, the matter had gone without the knowledge of men till this day.

"It's all there," said Alpin Stone. "When I found that plot, I had only to find as well mediums who were man and wife. Everything fell into place from then on."

sweet rolls and murder

by William Campbell Gault

Dave Elias detested a world that had used him unfairly. He was so warped that it took a frameup to get him wholly straightened out.

THE place was standard, white tile and a long white counter. Juke box and asphalt-tile floor in a mottled red and brown, chrome coffee makers on a six-unit chrome grill, the counterman reading a *Racing Form* at the far end of the counter from Dave.

A truck driver came in, slamming the door noisily behind him, and stopped to put a coin in the juke box. The strains of *Romance on the Range* bellowed from the machine as the truck driver took a stool.

The counterman put down his *Form* carefully and said, "Evening, Lenny. Ham and . . . right? How's it going tonight?"

"Like every night. What've you got in the fourth at Hollywood tomorrow, Ed? I could sure use a winner."

"I've got Scalded, two across the board, which means I'll lose six bucks. I've been burned so often I figure it's a good hunch bet—but don't listen to me."

The truck driver smiled and said nothing. The eggs sizzled on the griddle and Ed put a cover over them and turned off the flame. He poured a cup of coffee for Lenny

In selecting stories for THE SAINT it has been no part of our policy to choose the works of certain authors merely because they have won highly publicized prizes. Yet in recent issues our tables of contents have included William Faulkner (Nobel), T. S. Stribling (Pulitzer), Thomas Walsh and Fredric Brown (Mystery Writers of America Edgars), so perhaps prizes and merit walk hand in hand. Now Bill Gault has won himself an Edgar for his book DON'T CRY FOR ME. *And this new story shows why.*

and looked down at Dave's empty cup. "More coffee, mister?"

Dave shook his head. "I haven't the necessary extra dime, I'm afraid."

Ed looked at the thin face, the tall stooped frame and the dirty hands of Dave Elias. Ed said, "I guess one on the house won't break me. Looking for work, are you?"

"Not tonight." Dave watched him pour the coffee, then said, "Thank you very much."

The truck driver had pulled over the evening paper from the counter a few stools away and he didn't look up. The toaster popped two pieces of toast up, the juke box gave forth with *Romance on the Range* and Ed slid two perfectly fried eggs and a sliver of fried ham onto a warm plate and set it before Lenny.

Lenny put the paper down and reached for his fork. Ed gave him toast with butter and filled his coffee cup again.

Dave drank the coffee slowly, savoring it, wondering where it would be, tonight, that he'd sleep. This golden damned state had the coldest damned nights all year.

Ed said, "What I meant about a job, mister, I could use a relief man behind here. Two of us running it now, all week, and we could use some time off."

Dave frowned. "I'm pretty crummy and these are the only clothes I've got."

"I've got some wash pants would fit you," Ed persisted, "and we furnish the jackets. I could pick you up a couple shirts. There's a cabin back of here you could sleep in."

Dave didn't answer right away.

The truck driver said, "Leave him alone, Ed. Don't you see the guy likes it on the bum?"

Ed looked at the truck driver and the truck driver grinned at Dave. Then he stopped grinning. He was a hard man, this Lenny, and a fairly big one. But Dave Elias was looking at him as though he were some obnoxious form of insect and Dave was perfectly motionless on his stool.

Lenny went back to the paper, his face white, his hands trembling.

Ed smiled and said to Dave, "Lenny meant all right. You can't fight the world."

Dave looked at him, puzzled. The man knew him. In that second of total awareness that followed Ed's last sentence, Dave realized Ed must have known him from the moment he walked in.

"Some are like Lenny," Ed said easily, "and some aren't. Maybe too many are like Lenny but getting sore never cured anything."

Lenny looked up. "Hey, what the hell goes on?"

Ed smiled at him. "Nothing. Eat your eggs, Lenny. Drive your truck. Those things you understand and can handle. Play Scalded in the fourth tomorrow, play him to show."

Lenny stood up, his plate only half emptied. He put a dollar on the counter, and said, "Maybe you don't need my business, huh?" He turned and walked out.

Ed said, "I'm never going to get

rich, I guess." He took a deep breath. "Well—Sergeant Elias?"

"David Elias is the name. I lost the title when I lost the job. I'm not looking for pity from anyone."

Ed studied him gravely, saying nothing. Then he shook his head, expelled his breath and went over to ring up Lenny's dollar. He picked up the *Form* and sat again at the far end of the counter. From outside the sound of Lenny's truck came barking into life.

It was going to be cold again tonight. Dave was a damned fool, an arrogant thick-headed fool, nursing his animosity like a maladjusted adolescent. Since he was twelve he'd been quick to take offense, even on subjects that could have no bearing on his major resentment.

He sipped his coffee, and looked up at Ed. Then he said, "What's your last name, Ed?"

"Hovde—Ed Hovde." The bleak eyes met Dave's levelly.

"Swede?"

"The name's Norwegian." Flat voice, level eyes.

"Maybe then you might not understand about me. Maybe you haven't run into what I've run into all my life," said Dave.

"I haven't. But I can understand part of it. My mother was Jewish."

Silence. On the highway outside a car went by, logging.

Dave said, "Then you've had some days too."

"Some days, mostly when I was younger. But I learned that ignorance and malice aren't things you can beat with your hands. If a man can live with himself he can get by. I don't think you've learned to live with yourself."

Dave took a deep breath of air. "Maybe I could if I had a bath. Is there a shower in that shack?"

Ed smiled. "There's a shower. How about some eggs? You could watch me cook them, and have half your new trade learned. The other half is coffee."

"I could use some eggs," Dave said.

Later, after his shower, as he lay on the hard army cot, staring at the dark ceiling, his mind went back again to the scene at the station and he could almost feel his bony fists hammering into Burkhardt again, could almost hear the crack as he broke the bone in Burkhardt's nose. And then Burkhardt, unconscious on the floor.

His superior, *Lieutenant* Burkhardt.

Oh, that had been bright. Even the intervention of Captain Smolley, the testimonials of his many Department friends, hadn't saved him from the repercussions of those black and rage-filled minutes.

It hadn't been the first time he'd needed physical release for the resentment that boiled within him. It was probably the most important time. David Elias, college man, Olympic miler, detective-sergeant, bum. No, not bum, not any longer. Counterman—and how would you like your eggs?

He slept after awhile—restlessly and with dreams.

He had shaved and put on clean

clothes when he reported for work in the morning. Both Ed and his brother Rolf were behind the counter. Rolf was just another Ed as far as physical appearance went, shorter and a shade more intense.

"Sleep all right?" Ed asked.

Dave lied with a nod.

"Oatmeal?" Ed asked. "Toast, eggs, orange juice, soup? This is a high class joint. What'll it be?"

"Oatmeal. You really do need a relief man, Ed?"

"If Rolf and I want to go hunting we do. Figured we'd have you broken in by the weekend and the weekends are usually quiet here anyway."

Dave learned to cook eggs without flame, to keep a griddle clean and how to get the most and best out of a pound of coffee. Beyond that there wasn't much to learn at this gastronomical level.

Some peace came to him, some semblance of adjustment to his present status, but nothing approaching contentment. He stayed with it out of lethargy.

It was a coast town, this Elverno, north of Los Angeles, and it hadn't been chance alone that had brought him this way. He had been half drunk that night and completely broke and some alcoholic spirit of vengeance had sent him north toward the Rowan estate.

It was on the edge of town, a showplace, modern as next week and as expensively splashy as its owner, Bus Rowan. Bus was the untouchable who made the puppets dance in L.A. Bus was Mr. Big in Southern California crime. Dave had brought more than one Rowan stooge into court and seen the kind of lawyers Bus hired get the man off with a light sentence, or none.

A part of it was Dave's fault, he realized now. He hadn't gone into court with the kind of case a good cop knew was necessary. Against the Rowan legal lights a man had to be airtight and he hadn't been. It isn't what you *know* in court, it's what you can *prove.*

There had been sharp words from the D.A., softer words from Captain Smolley, the wrong word from Lieutenant Burkhardt after the last of these cases. His frustration had built up the animosity. Lieutenant Burkhardt had supplied the trigger.

The scene haunted him as did the others before it, not because of his opponent's intolerance but because of the blind and murderous extent of his own rage.

Maybe, he thought, *I've been on the wrong side of the fence. Maybe I'm more suited to Rowan's side.*

He had meant to get Rowan that night but too much of the alcohol was dissipated by the time he got to Elverno. Too much of his anger had evaporated in the senseless weeks since his dismissal.

At Ed and Rolf Hovde's, over a cup of coffee, a part of his sanity had returned.

And now he fried eggs.

It was Friday night and Ed said, "Well, Dave, we're leaving tonight instead of tomorrow morning this time. You can close it up tonight any damned time you please."

"I want to listen to that UCLA-Illinois game anyway," Dave said. "Might as well stay open. Good hunting, Ed."

"Yup." Ed paused at the door, and turned. "I almost forgot, you had a call this afternoon. Didn't say who she was."

"She? A woman?"

"Woman or girl. Said she'd call again." The door closed behind him.

Well, Ed had known him from his pictures. There must have been others, customers, who had a memory for faces seen in the newspapers. Perhaps a girl reporter for one of the local or neighboring weekly sheets.

New resident in Elverno, David Elias, former detective-sergeant . . . Or perhaps a female stooge for one of the big-town gossip-purveyors, sniffing out what they called a human interest story. Strange that so much of human interest should frequently involve humiliation.

Or perhaps Marge . . . No, not Marge, not now, not in his present state of mind. Perhaps someday but not now.

It was Illinois' ball, second and six on the UCLA thirty-eight-yard line, when the door opened.

The girl who stood there was dark and slim, with an attractive intelligent face. She had worn his ring not too long ago and soothed him and been his girl all the way, his Marge.

Now she said, "Hello, Dave."

He didn't answer right away. He stared at her, his hunger greater than his shame. Finally he said, "Who told you I was here?" He snapped off the radio.

"Lieutenant Burkhardt. He's sorry, Dave." She came in to take the stool directly in front of him. "I didn't believe the man had any sense of right or any conscience but we were wrong about him."

"You came to tell me that?"

"Isn't it important? Does it matter why I came? Isn't it enough that I'm here?"

Some battle, they'd had. Some tongue he had and she was no girl to submit meekly to invective. The memory of their final quarrel shamed him now as it must shame her.

"I don't give a damn for Lieutenant Burkhardt," Dave said, "and I'm sorry you're here, Marge."

Her smile showed him how much she believed that. "How's the coffee, Dave? Could we have a cup of coffee together while you insult me some more?"

He poured two cups, putting no cream in hers. He brought the chair over from the end of the counter.

"Burkhardt," he said musingly. "I wonder if he was looking for me. Is that how he discovered I was here?"

"I suppose so. How else?"

"Well," he said, and stopped. "Tell me more about what *he* said."

"He said you're smart and competent and hard working and he's sorry about everything that happened to you."

"Particularly his nose, he's sorry

about," Dave guessed. "Why didn't he come, himself?"

"I told him *I* wanted to."

There was a silence. He avoided her eyes. "You've been working on this, haven't you? You've been winning friends and influencing people again? You never give up, do you?"

"Never. Dave, tell me you don't love me and I'll walk out that door. Say it if you can."

His voice was low. "What difference does it make if I love you or not? You want to be an unmarried woman all your life? This much I guarantee you, we'll never be married. I'll bring no kids into the world to take what I've taken."

"Maybe they won't have to. Maybe the world will be different. Maybe people will be—decent."

"In twenty years? When they haven't been for thousands?"

"All right. We won't talk about it now. I'd forgotten that with you it isn't a nationality or a religion—it's a disease. But what will I tell Lieutenant Burkhardt?"

"Nothing I'd want a lady to voice. Send him down and I'll tell him."

She sighed and looked at the white counter. She looked up and said, "Why? What's to be gained by venom?"

"Nothing. But he hasn't changed despite his talk. And I'd be under him. Marge, you shouldn't have come."

She looked at him for seconds, then stood up. "I thought you could have changed. I prayed for that. You're right, I shouldn't have come." She studied him a moment and went out.

He heard her car start outside, the sturdy little Austin he had helped her pick out.

He picked up the cups and put them in the sink and turned on the radio again. It was half time and the announcer was interviewing someone or other. He turned it off, staring out the big front window.

It didn't make sense. That wasn't like Burkhardt—unless Marge had got to more important people than seemed likely. Which could very well be. But why would Burkhardt look him up? He wouldn't.

He closed up at ten o'clock but didn't go to the shack. He walked down to the drug store and bought a couple magazines and then headed north, walking on the left edge of the highway.

The fog from the ocean was light and he could hear the wash of the surf. On a small bluff, overlooking the curve of the highway and the bay, the Rowan house was visible in the light from the three-quarter moon.

He turned up the driveway, keeping in the shadows of the eucalyptus trees that bordered it. Big cars in the drive, two of them foreign. And a '47 Olds Club, black with white-wall tires. That car Dave knew but he memorized the license number just for checking.

He hadn't been able to see the cars from the road. He had come up here solely for that purpose.

He started back and a shadow

detached itself from the larger shadow of the eucalyptus shading the parking area. This shadow had a cigarette in its hand.

"Looking for somebody?"

"Mmm-hmm. I've found him."

The man was visible in the clear moonlight, a short heavy man with a cherub's round face. Moon Scarlatti, a Rowan trouble-shooter, a mild and murderous man with no record of convictions.

"Sergeant Elias," he said. "I'll be damned."

"Eventually you will be, Moon. Boss throwing a party?"

"Could be. You're out of the department now, ain't you, Elias?"

Dave nodded.

"You got no standing at all then. You could be a prowler, sneaking up here like this."

"That's right, Shorty," Dave said quietly and lied. "An *armed* prowler and that would be quite a stretch. Call the cops, Shorty."

"You know my name, Elias. You're not so damned tough." A bit of raggedness in the voice which could have been anger but was probably fear.

"I know your name and your trade and I'm not tough at all, Shorty. But I'm bigger than you and I'm waiting for you to give me an excuse to kill you."

Moon Scarlatti was as quiet as the night and as motionless as the trunk of the eucalyptus. Finally he muttered, "You're crazy. They all say you're crazy and I believe it myself now."

Again Dave nodded. "We understand each other, Moon. Tell the boss I'd have dropped in but saw he had company."

He turned his back on the bulky man and went down the drive to the highway and down the highway to home.

He slept like a baby that night.

He opened at seven next morning and had the usual breakfast crowd. At nine Chief Ericson dropped in.

It was a part-time job, chief of the Elverno city police, and Chief Ericson was a veterinary the rest of the time. He was a big blond man, grave and friendly.

"Had a complaint this morning, Dave. I'll have one of those sweet rolls—the one with the jelly in the middle—and coffee." He settled his bulk on one of the inadequate stools.

Dave poured him some coffee and slid the roll he had asked for onto a plate. He took a pat of butter from the crock and brought the plate over. "Complaint on me, Chief?" He met the blue eyes frankly.

"Yup. From one of the moneyed citizens of this town. Trespassing, he said you were."

"I was, Chief. It won't happen again. But I didn't think he'd kick. I didn't think he'd ever run to the law."

"It surprised *me*. Could I bother you for the sugar, Dave?"

"Sorry." Dave brought it out from the ledge where they were stacked. He tried to think of something light to say and failed.

Ericson made a one-act play of buttering the sweet roll. "I don't

like him any more than you do, Dave, nor any of his friends. If he should ever so much as spit on the sidewalk I'd clap him in the clink—and quick. But I'm the law in this town—you got troubles, you come to me. Okay?"

"That's clear enough," Dave said. "It was a dumb move, Chief, and I'm not exactly sure why I went up there."

"I think I am," the chief said quietly. "I could go for another of these rolls. You got one just like the one I had?"

The chief had hammed it a little but Dave knew he wasn't kidding about coming to him. This town was orderly and would stay that way as long as Chief Ericson lived.

The rest of the morning was quiet and devoted to the careful frying of eggs. There was a rush at noon and then the place was a morgue again. He'd rather have been busy—he wanted no time to think. Lately any thinking he did would be better described as brooding—or moping.

He was cooking his own lunch when the door opened around one thirty and Moon Scarlatti walked in. He was smiling. He said, "The boss would like to see you tonight, Sarge. He's sorry about that phone call he put in to the law."

"He wouldn't have anything to say I'd be interested in," Dave said quietly.

"I think he would. He's gone soft, Sarge. He wants to go legit. And he's got all kinds of names you'd be interested in. I think it's some kind of deal he wants to make with the big city law."

"I'm not with them," Dave said. "Not any more."

"But you could be. What better way to get back in with the D.A.? Be smart, Sarge. Drop in. What can you lose?" The stocky man paused. "There's nothing to be scared of."

"I'll be there at nine-thirty," Dave said.

It didn't smell right, Rowan working through Dave. The rest he could accept. There was something about the big money that prompted the scum to seek respectability at whatever cost to doubtful loyalties. Rowan was rich enough to want respect now. He had kids back in town, in boarding school, and money wasn't enough there. But why would he want to deal through Dave?

Unless he thought there was a headline in it somewhere—unless he could enshrine himself in the press as a public benefactor, revealing the rats, working through the down-and-outer who'd been kicked off the force. It could make interesting reading for a gullible public.

He walked up again that night, knowing it was a jerk's move, realizing it could be a trap, though armed against that eventuality.

The moon was behind a cloud, the driveway dimly illuminated. He saw a light shining through the windows from the other end of the house as he stepped up onto the low, house-wide porch.

To his right he saw a shadow—and no more.

In that split-second of super-

awareness, before the darkness came, he realized he had been a poor cop once again.

Darkness and strange dreams, one of them about a man named Jeff Keller, and who was he? A name from nowhere and then he remembered it was a kid who had sat next to him in Econ class. Darkness and some pain and frustration and hate and some fear and voices.

One voice—"Guess he's always had it in for the boss. Why would he work so close after getting bounced off the force? The sarge was no guy to work the legal way. He always got beat by the boss, every time he went into court. The boss wanted to see him tonight but who'd know the guy would come loaded? I heard the shot and came into the study and there he was, still standing over the boss."

Dave opened his eyes. He was on a couch in a book-lined room that opened onto the back patio. Near the glass sliding doors Moon Scarlatti was talking to Chief Ericson. On the floor there was a body, the body of Bus Rowan.

What a lousy stupid cop he had been. Discredited, on record as hating Bus Rowan, walking into a factional strife as the fall guy.

Chief Ericson said casually, "You came in prepared for trouble, didn't you? What'd you hit him with?"

"A sap. Working with the boss, Chief, a guy's always prepared for trouble. I don't have to tell you that, I guess."

Ericson looked down at the body and then a man came in from the living-room entrance, a man with a bag, a medic obviously.

"I'll want the slug, of course, Doc," Ericson said quietly and looked again at Moon Scarlatti. "Just the two of you here, you and Rowan?"

"Yup. The housekeeper always goes into a movie on Saturday nights and the handy man was visiting his folks in Venice."

"Do you know what Rowan wanted to see Elias about?"

"I don't, Chief."

A silence and then the doctor said, "Well, this one's dead enough. The man on the couch—how about him?"

"Slugged," Ericson said. "Maybe I shouldn't have put him up there, huh, Doc?"

The doctor rose and Dave closed his eyes.

He heard Ericson say, "Show me where you were when you heard the shot, Scarlatti. I want to get this all straight."

Dave heard them walk out of the room and then the doctor had his right hand and was over him.

Ericson wasn't that bad a cop, though he pretended to be a big rube. Ericson wasn't that dumb.

Dave opened his eyes and the doctor smiled. "Coming out of it?"

Dave stirred, hating his next move, knowing it was the only move, dropping his left hand off the edge of the couch and balling the fist.

He put the twist of his body into it and aimed for a point on the

right side of the doctor's chin.

It landed exactly where he had aimed and the doctor made no sound as he fell across Dave.

Dave struggled clear and got to his feet. Pain spurted through his brain at the sudden movement and for one blinded second he stood tottering next to the couch.

Then he headed for the open glass doors at the rear.

There was a veritable cliff behind the patio and Dave half slid, half ran over most of it. Then, a quarter of the way from the bottom, he stumbled over a rock and pitched forward.

A protruding limb bruised his cheekbone and his ankle twisted awkwardly under him. He fell in gravel that loosened a tooth and lay quiescent a moment, all the fight out of him.

The ankle throbbed with the beat of his heart and nausea was stirring in the pit of his stomach. Run, run, run . . . Why should he run from the so-and-so's? The frame and the cross and the knout were his destiny, just as they'd always been. Where could he run to with the net out?

Ericson would be back in the room by now. Hell, he'd be on the phone by now and how could he escape the net they'd thrown? He had walked into a frame and even now the net would be forming.

He rose after awhile and hobbled toward the highway at the far end of the canyon. A man's got to believe in something—at the moment, he'd try to believe in Ericson.

He came out boldly at the highway end of the canyon and crossed over to the right side of the road. If it didn't happen here he might have a chance to make the city. If it didn't happen here . . .

Headlights bore down on him and he turned to face them, jerking his thumb up in the universal entreaty.

It was a battered '41 Chevrolet and it slowed, stopped and he ran toward the open door.

There were two men in the front and one in the back and they looked at him curiously.

"Los Angeles?" Dave asked and the driver nodded. The man in back moved over to give him room.

"Missed the bus," Dave said, getting in, "and I just got word my sister's sick."

The driver said, "This is a little quicker than the bus if the bus does a lot of stopping."

There was no further dialogue.

They dropped him off at Olympic and Sepulveda and he headed over toward Pico. It was slow going with the swollen ankle and he realized suddenly that if the men should read about him tomorrow, this would be a tip-off to the department. Because most of his friends there knew about Marge.

But where else did he have to go?

She lived in the rear apartment of a triplex right off Pico and there was a light showing in the living-room windows. He pressed the button and heard her footsteps and then the peep-hole opened in the

door and the light overhead went abruptly on.

The door immediately swung open and she said, "Dave, what's happened?"

"I'm in trouble," he said and then she was in his arms.

"Oh, Dave, I've been sick, thinking of you! What's happened now?" She had both arms around his waist. She looked up into his scratched and dirty face. He could feel her tremble.

"I've sprained my ankle for one thing. I'd better sit down."

He hobbled to the davenport, and pulled off his shoe. He told her about Moon's visit and about going up to Rowan's and about his flight.

Then he said, "And I came running to you. After the way I talked to you last night, after the way I've gone to hell, I had to come running to you."

"You shouldn't have run at all," she said. "Dave, don't you see, by running you've as much as admitted you're guilty."

He didn't argue or try to explain. She put an ice-pack on the ankle and brought him a full jigger of whiskey. She bathed his scratched face with a cold wet towel.

The lethargy he had felt at the foot of the cliff came back and he hated to move, to leave this sanctuary. But there were places to go and people to see.

He said, "If you'd bind that ankle real tight I think it's usable. And I'll want your car."

She was wringing out the towel in a basin of cold water and she looked up to stare at him. "Dave, you're not going out again tonight?"

He nodded.

She continued to stare. "Is it some kind of masochism? Lord knows you've had trouble enough but now I see you hunt it, don't you? You stuck your neck way way out, going up to that Rowan's house, but that isn't enough stupidity for one night."

"My neck's still out there," he said quietly. "Would you like it better if I sulked or got drunk again? Or stayed here and dragged you into the mess?"

She put the towel back in the water and expelled her breath. "Where are you going?"

"Out to find a killer. Where else?" He straightened on the couch. "You know, I've been a hot-headed fool. Do you love me, Marge?"

Her eyes were wet but her voice was steady. "I wish I didn't. I've wished it a long time now. Dave, sometimes I think you're . . ." She compressed her lips.

He smiled weakly. "Crazy? Even Moon Scarlatti noticed that. I've learned some things though, Marge —from the Hovde brothers."

Her voice was soft. "What, Dave?"

"Oh, that we're all more or less alone, maybe one friend, maybe two. Ed's got Rolf and Rolf's got Ed and together they've got the hamburger stand and they don't seem to need much more. I can't lick the mob and the mob thinkers aren't ever going to be my buddies.

"But I gave them more im-

portance than they're worth. They're small men trying to look big by climbing on the necks of the minorities. They're small men and defeated —and scared by a life too big for them." He swung his feet off the couch.

Marge's eyes moved around his face. "That was quite a speech from you. Ed's got Rolf and who have you got, professor?"

"You."

"Not if you walk out that door tonight, you haven't."

"Yes, I have—we're for us." He stood up and took a deep breath of air. "You know it, Marge."

"Damn you," she said. "Damn you, damn you, *damn* you!" And then she was in his arms and hanging on, trembling and warm and crying a little, his Marge.

"The keys," he said after awhile. "You wouldn't want me to be a part-time counterman forever, would you? The keys to your car, darling."

"Dave—"

"The keys. It's very important for both of us. They'll be here soon, I'm sure."

She brought him the keys. "All right, slugger." And then she gripped both his arms in her clenched hands. "Dave, be careful, be especially careful now, won't you? This new you we mustn't lose, darling."

He still had the currency he had pulled out of the register on locking up, and the key. The key wasn't important—the Hovde's had others. Most of the money, he left with Marge for safe-keeping.

Then he took her Austin out of the garage and headed toward Westchester. This would be the important move and he'd have to rely on the captain's friendship, the captain's faith.

His ankle was tightly bound but he still had to manipulate the brake with his heel. The pressure of the accelerator didn't bother it much.

The captain's house was in the Loyola University section and it was all dark. Dave went up to ring the front door bell.

He rang it again after a pause and then a light went on in the back and then a light in the small entry hall and Captain Smolley stood there in a sagging bathrobe.

The light over Dave's head went on and the captain seemed to pause in indecision. He opened the door. "Sober, Dave?"

He was shorter and broader than Dave, a man of about fifty. He was watching Dave closely.

"Sober—and wanted for murder, sir. I've been framed."

This would be the decisive second. The captain would need faith in him right now. A man coming out of an extended binge, a man with a record of resentment—and the captain knew it.

He didn't say anything for seconds, his thoughtful gaze studying Dave. Then he said, "Come in."

The living room looked dingy in the light from the ancient floor lamp. Captain Smolley sat on the mohair davenport. Dave sat in the matching chair.

Dave told him everything from

Moon Scarlatti's visit up to his flight. He didn't mention Marge.

The captain didn't interrupt. He scarcely moved during the entire recital. Then he went over to a smoking-stand to get a pipe and load it. He looked at the match as he said, "And now you're here. Why, Dave? You weren't even civil the last time we were together."

"I know it. And I know you can't interfere in Chief Ericson's town. I thought you might be interested in a theory of mine, a theory involving Burkhardt."

A dim smile came to the captain's grave face. "You sure dislike that man, don't you?"

Dave nodded. "Do you want to hear the theory, sir?"

Smolley dragged deeply on his pipe. "I'm listening."

It had been Burkhardt's '47 Olds he had seen in Rowan's driveway the night before—but the rest of his story was speculation. But Smolley showed more interest after learning about the car.

Half an hour later Dave was driving up the coast highway, headed toward Elverno. It was almost two o'clock and the housekeeper would be there. Mrs. Rowan no longer lived with her spouse though they hadn't been divorced.

The important thing was, Moon Scarlatti would be there, and Dave wanted to talk to him alone.

It was the housekeeper who answered the door, a heavy Mexican woman. Dave said, "Mr. Scarlatti's here, isn't he? It's very important."

She looked at Dave apprehensively—and then a voice from the hall behind her said, "I'm here Mrs. Aragon. "You can go to bed."

The hall light went on and she turned to go as Moon came to the door. The stocky man was wearing a dressing robe and had a hand in one pocket.

Dave said, "Who framed me, Moon? You?"

"Nobody. Stand where you are. You make one wrong move and—"

"Relax, Moon. You've been seeing too many movies. You think I don't know what's going on in the organization? You think half the cops in town don't know—even Ericson?"

Moon stared at him, saying nothing at all.

"I thought the boss really did have a deal," Dave went on. "I thought he might want to cut me in and get a really smart operator. But it's true what you said, wasn't it? He was going straight. And he did have a story for the department."

"You're a great guesser," Moon said finally.

"All right. I'll be at the restaurant all day tomorrow if you should get smart. You can phone me there."

Moon said, "Restaurant? With Ericson looking for you?"

"He's not looking for me, Moon. Phone him. I'll wait." He turned and started for the car, offering his back to Moon.

"Wait," Moon said.

Dave stopped. "I'll wait in the car. I'm not running away from a hick cop, Moon."

"I don't mean that," Moon said. "If you didn't kill the boss, who did? Who does the law figure?"

"I don't know. Have you got a stooge to give them?"

"Look, it was your gun, the bullet was from your gun. That they'll prove and if you didn't . . ." Moon stopped.

"They must figure I was framed, and right here," Dave said. "If you want to check phone Ericson or phone the Chief in town. Or phone your boss and maybe we can work out something together. I don't intend to be a counterman all my life, Moon. That's why I was here last night. I'd like to get aboard the gravy boat too."

He went down to the car, started the motor and drove away. Moon stood in the doorway through all of it.

Ericson was at home and dressed. Dave said, "I've just been up to see Moon. I may have got something started."

Ericson nodded. "With your gun and your hating Rowan the way you did. The captain must have a lot of faith in you. You wouldn't have a whisper of a chance in any court. And you know it."

"I know. And you, leaving the room unguarded. Maybe you wanted me to run."

"Maybe. I'm no cop though. I'm a pretty sad specimen for a chief but this is a very small town."

"I've seen worse cops in bigger jobs," Dave said.

"Naming no names?" Ericson smiled. "Maybe you're just believing what you want to believe about the lieutenant."

"He was up there last night. Somebody tips those boys off on the big raids. And why should he go to my girl unless he'd rather have me back on the force than at the restaurant? At the restaurant I can see him come and go.

"When I learned he'd told Marge where I was I realized he must have seen me here. That seemed strange until I remembered how close it was to Rowan's. It's all guesswork, sure. But we'll see who Moon calls up now."

"How'll we know whom he calls?"

"The captain's got a man covering Burkhardt. I think the kill was his because he had the most to lose if Rowan went straight. His would be the first name given to the Chief. When a man rats on one of his people the rest get nervous. Burkhardt probably sold the gang a bill of goods."

"And how did they know you were coming, for sure?"

"They probably didn't. They probably kept Rowan tied up until I had a chance to get there though. Were there any indications of rope marks on his wrists or ankles?"

Ericson nodded. "Which is one reason I'm going along with you and the captain."

Dave smiled. "And why did you give me the chance to run? That was before you knew about the rope marks."

"I'm a lousy cop," Ericson said. "I'm a veterinarian and I hate to see a dumb ornery animal suffer." He

sighed. "I got some coffee on the stove. Let's go out to the kitchen and have a cup."

They were drinking coffee when the phone rang and Ericson answered it. When he came back to the kitchen, he said, "That was the captain. Burkhardt's on the way out here now."

Dave was sitting on the bed in his underwear with the lights out when he heard the car coming into the yard past the restaurant and saw the lights. Then the lights went out and he waited.

When the rap on the door came he made the bed springs squeak by moving around on the bed and called, "Who's there?"

"It's Fritz Burkhardt, Dave. Hell of a time to call but it's important."

Dave turned on the light before he opened the door. It could have been his second dumb move of the night but there was no other trap he could think of.

Burkhardt stood there quietly, both hands in the open—and empty. Dave relaxed at the sight, said, "Come in, Lieutenant."

He was a big blond man, fit and young looking. He smiled and said, "Someday you'll have to give me a return match, Dave. It was my ego you damaged more than the nose."

"Don't let my build fool you," Dave said. "Lots of mean gents are skinny. You didn't come to offer me my job back, Lieutenant?"

"Why not?" He went over to sit on the bed. The room's only chair held Dave's clothes.

"I don't want it, for one thing. I'm going over to the other side of the fence, where the money is."

Burkhardt's smile was wry. "You sure got Moon all riled up. What's the pitch, Dave?"

"You tell me."

"I might be telling you more than you know. That would be dumb. I don't figure I'm quite as bright as you, Dave, but I'm no Moon Scarlatti."

"No, you're no Moon Scarlatti. That sweet frame I walked into would be too involved for Moon. He wouldn't realize that motive's the big thing in murder, bigger than means or opportunity. You'd know that and know I had the motive. Your frame, Lieutenant?"

"Maybe. I've always hated you, Dave, and it wasn't until tonight I realized why. You're smarter than I am and the only way I can feel superior is to run down your race. Maybe I've seen the light, Dave."

"Which wouldn't stop you from putting a knife in my back at the first opportunity."

"I wouldn't kill a bright boy—not when he was on my side."

"And what's your side worth to me, Lieutenant?"

Burkhardt didn't answer right away. He looked at the rumpled bed and at Dave's clothes on the chair. He looked around the small room. He said, "How much did Ericson cost you and where did you get the money?"

"I didn't have any money," Dave said. "Ericson wants in. And it would be smart because this is *his*

town with *his* law and a sanctuary for us. But he's going to need a fall guy."

Admiration showed in Burkhardt's smile. "You know, Dave, I think we're going to get along. And it's about time. I'm still a cop, you know, and we could give Ericson his fall guy. *I* could give him Moon."

"And have him blabbing all over the place? Lieutenant, that isn't very bright."

"He won't be talking when I deliver him. He'll be killed resisting arrest and the underworld organization of Bus Rowan will be broken up—in the newspapers."

Dave was silent, nodding. "You're keeping your job?"

"Both of them. And you come back on the force, Dave. Then there won't be a trick we'll miss, a move we won't know of."

"If you don't mind working with me," Dave said quietly.

Burkhardt frowned. "Oh, Dave, break it off. That was just because you—I hated your guts and blackballing you made me feel like I had the edge on you. That's all it was. *You know* that."

"Okay. I guess my memory is too sharp."

"Sure. I need your brains, Dave. I admire them. And they'll bring the kind of money they're worth from now on."

Dave reached for his socks. "And what about Moon? We'd better work fast."

"You go back to bed. I'll take care of Moon in the next hour. But you're sure about Ericson? He won't play any tricks on us?"

"I'll guarantee it," Dave said. "I know him and there aren't any tricks he can afford to play." He put his socks back on the chair. "I'll see you in the morning."

Burkhardt winked. "Happy days ahead and not on a cop's crummy salary."

Dave didn't start to dress until he heard Burkhardt's car start . . .

Chief Ericson said, "I was waiting in Rowan's living-room behind that corner drape. You know, where the piano is. I told Moon Burkhardt would be gunning for him and I told him we knew who'd killed Rowan—but if Moon wanted to take the rap for it that was his stupidity. So he played along. He sat there in the living-room after I convinced him Burkhardt wouldn't kill him there, not with the housekeeper at home."

Dave said, "Burkhardt *is* the murderer then? I wasn't sure about that part of it."

"He was. He tried to get Moon outside, telling him they should go to town because you'd bought me out, told him that with me fifteen feet from him. Moon began to get the jitters." Ericson smiled. "I never saw a man so scared. He said it wasn't his kill and why should he worry and that's when Burkhardt pulled the gun and told him to come out and get in the car."

"And that," Dave said, smiling, "is when Chief of Police Ericson made his dramatic entrance from

behind the drape. I wish I'd been there. But, Chief, have we got a case, a tight clean case?"

"I don't follow you, Dave. What kind of case?"

"I mean, can we take Burkhardt into court and be sure of a conviction?"

Ericson shook his head. "I don't see how, Dave. Not dead like he is as of now."

"Dead?" Dave stared at the big man incredulously.

"Sure thing. When Burkhardt swung around to face me the gun swung with him, and it looked like his finger was tightening. I'm no prize cop, Dave, but if there's anything I hate it's a crooked one. I couldn't take chances with a man like that."

Dave exhaled slowly. "*You*—killed him. You killed Burkhardt?"

"Had to. Dave, look, you're going to open the restaurant, tomorrow, aren't you? I got to have some of those sweet rolls and the Hovdes are the only ones in town who got the kind I—"

"I'll open it," Dave said. "I'd be afraid not to with you wanting sweet rolls. And Chief, how about Moon? You didn't . . . ?" He didn't finish.

"Kill him? Why Dave, we need Moon. He's the talkingest man you ever saw and I'm just photogenic enough to like the looks of my picture in all the big city papers. I'm just rube enough to like that."

Dave rose. "I'd better get to bed. I'll call my girl and have her bring the key out early in the morning. I won't keep you waiting for your sweet rolls, Chief. They're on the house—you've sure earned them."

When reading a magazine like THE SAINT it is always a pleasure to be able to name your own poison—or at any rate to select your stories, like the contents of a well-stocked wine-cellar, according each to its own variety of flavor and background.

In short, if variety is your dish, you should relish this advance listing of a few of the short stories due to appear in our next issue. You like your murder with a traditional upper-case English background? Then Sax Rohmer's THE MAN WHO KILLED BLACKBIRDS is your dish. Or if you prefer the more emotional Hollywood flavor Steve Fisher will be front and present with his heart-rending ME AND MICKEY MOUSE. Intrigue? Try the late great E. Phillips Oppenheim and Peter Ruff in THE GHOSTS OF HAVANA HARBOR. Solid American? We're offering Ben Ames Williams' brilliant HIS OWN PETARD. And these are only a few.

the professor had a key

by . . . Arthur Conan Doyle

No reasonable doubt existed as to the identity of the Belmore Museum vandal. His motive was the mystery.

MY PARTICULAR FRIEND, Ward Mortimer, was one of the best men of his day at everything connected with Oriental archaeology. He had written largely upon the subject, he had lived two years in a tomb at Thebes while he excavated in the Valley of the Kings, and finally he had created a considerable sensation by his exhumation of the alleged mummy of Cleopatra in the inner room of the Temple of Horus at Philae.

With such a record at the age of thirty-one it was felt that a considerable career lay before him. No one was surprised when he was elected to the curatorship of the Belmore Street Museum, which carries with it the lectureship at the Oriental College and an income which has sunk with the fall in land but which still remains at that ideal sum which is large enough to encourage an investigator, yet not so large as to enervate him.

There was only one reason which made Ward Mortimer's position a little difficult at the Belmore Street Museum, and that was the extreme eminence of the man whom he had to succeed. Professor Andreas was a profound scholar and a man of European reputation. His lectures were frequented by students from

To think of Conan Doyle is to think of Sherlock Holmes. True, this great Englishman won fame and deservedly in the fields of both the historical novel and science fiction —but in the mystery field Doyle is Holmes and Holmes is Doyle to the popular imagination. Yet Sir Arthur wrote many other mysteries, fine and ingenious mysteries, in which the Sage of Baker Street did not appear. And this is one of his very best.

Reprinted by permission of the estate of the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.
Originally published as "The Jew's Breastplate."

every part of the world, and his admirable management of the collection intrusted to his care was a commonplace in all learned societies.

There was, therefore, considerable surprise when, at the age of fifty-five, Professor Andreas suddenly resigned his position and retired from those duties which had been both his livelihood and his pleasure. He and his daughter left the comfortable suite of rooms which had formed his official residence in connection with the museum and my friend, Mortimer, who was a bachelor, took up his quarters there.

On hearing of Mortimer's appointment Professor Andreas had written his successor a very kindly and flattering congratulatory letter. I was actually present at their first meeting, and I went with Mortimer round the museum when the Professor showed us the admirable collection which he had cherished so long.

The Professor's beautiful daughter and a young man, Captain Wilson, who was, as I understood, soon to be her husband, accompanied us in our inspection. There were fifteen rooms, but the Babylonian, the Syrian and the central hall, which contained the Hebrew and Egyptian collection, were the finest of all.

Professor Andreas was a quiet dry elderly man with a clean-shaven face and an impassive manner, but his dark eyes sparkled and his features quickened into enthusiastic life as he pointed out to us the rarity and the beauty of some of his specimens. His hand lingered so fondly over them that one could read his pride in them and the grief in his heart now that they were passing from his care into that of another.

Andreas had shown us in turn his mummies, his papyri, his rare scarabs, his inscriptions, his Hebrew relics and his duplication of the famous seven-branched candlestick of the Temple, which was brought to Rome by Titus and which is supposed by some to be lying at this instant in the bed of the Tiber. Then he approached a case which stood in the very center of the hall and he looked down through the glass with reverence in his attitude and manner.

"This is no novelty to an expert like yourself, Mr. Mortimer," said he, "but I daresay your friend, Mr. Jackson, will be interested to see it."

Leaning over the case I saw an object, some five inches square, which consisted of twelve precious stones in a framework of gold with golden hooks at two of the corners. The stones were all varying in sort and color but they were of the same size. Their shapes, arrangement and gradation of tint made me think of a box of watercolor paints. Each stone had some hieroglyphic scratched upon its surface.

"You have heard, Mr. Jackson, of the urim and thummim?"

I had heard the term but my idea of its meaning was exceedingly vague.

"The urim and thummim was a name given to the jeweled plate which lay upon the breast of the

high priest of the Jews. They had a very special feeling of reverence for it—something of the feeling which an ancient Roman might have for the Sibylline books in the Capitol. There are, as you see, twelve magnificent stones, inscribed with mystical characters. Counting from the left-hand top corner the stones are carnelian, peridot, emerald, ruby, lapis lazuli, onyx, sapphire, agate, amethyst, topaz, beryl and jasper."

I was amazed at the variety and beauty of the stones. "Has the breastplate any particular history?" I asked.

"It is of great age and immense value," said Professor Andreas. "Without being able to make an absolute assertion we have many reasons to think it is possible that it may be the original urim and thummim of Solomon's Temple. There is certainly nothing so fine in any collection in Europe. My friend, Captain Wilson here, is a practical authority upon precious stones and he can tell you how pure these are."

Captain Wilson, a man with a dark hard incisive face, was standing beside his *fiancée* at the other side of the case.

"Yes," said he curtly, "I have never seen finer stones."

"And the gold-work is also worthy of attention. The ancients excelled in—" He was apparently about to indicate the setting of the stones when Captain Wilson interrupted him.

"You will see a finer example of their gold-work in this candlestick," said Wilson, turning to another table, and we all joined him in his admiration of its embossed stem and delicately ornamented branches. Altogether it was an interesting and novel experience to have objects of such rarity explained by so great an expert.

When finally Professor Andreas finished our inspection by formally handing over the precious collection to the care of my friend, I could not help pitying him and envying his successor, whose life was to pass in so pleasant a duty. Within a week Ward Mortimer was duly installed in his new set of rooms and had become the autocrat of the Belmore Street Museum.

About a fortnight afterwards my friend gave a small dinner to half a dozen bachelor friends to celebrate his promotion. When his guests were departing he pulled my sleeve and signaled to me that he wished me to remain.

"You have only a few hundred yards to go," said he—I was living in chambers in the Albany. "You may as well stay and have a quiet cigar with me. I very much want your advice."

I relapsed into an armchair and lit one of his excellent Matronas. When he had returned from seeing the last of his guests out he drew a letter from his dress-jacket and sat down opposite me.

"This is an anonymous letter which I received this morning," said Mortimer. "I want to read it to you and obtain your advice."

"You are welcome to it for what it is worth."

"This is how the note runs—'Sir, I should strongly advise you to keep a very careful watch over the many valuable things which are committed to your charge. I do not think that the present system of a single watchman is sufficient. Be upon your guard or an irreparable misfortune may occur.'"

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that is all."

"Well," said I, "it is at least obvious that it was written by one of the limited number of people who are aware that you have only one watchman at night."

Ward Mortimer handed me the note with a curious smile. "Have you an eye for handwriting?" he said. "Now look at this!" He put another letter in front of me. "Look at the *c* in 'congratulate' and the *c* in 'committed.' Look at the capital *I*. Look at the trick of putting in a dash instead of a stop!" He paused to eye me speculatively.

"They are undoubtedly from the same hand—with some attempt at disguise in the case of this first one."

"The second," said Ward Mortimer, "is the letter of congratulation which was written to me by Professor Andreas upon my obtaining my appointment."

I stared at him in amazement. Then I turned over the letter in my hand and there, sure enough, was *Martin Andreas* signed upon the other side. There could be no doubt in the mind of anyone who had the slightest knowledge of the science of graphology that the Professor had written an anonymous letter, warning his successor against thieves. It was inexplicable but it was certain.

"Why should he do it?" I asked.

"Precisely what I wished to ask you. If he had any such misgivings why could he not come and tell me direct?"

"Will you speak to him about it?"

"There again I am in doubt. He might choose to deny that he wrote such a missive."

"At any rate," said I, "this warning is meant in a friendly spirit and I should certainly act upon it. Are the present precautions enough to insure you against robbery?"

"I should have thought so. The public is only admitted from ten till five, and there is a guardian to every two rooms. He stands at the door between them and so commands them both.

"When the public is gone we at once put up the great iron shutters, which are absolutely burglar-proof. The watchman is a capable fellow. He sits in the lodge but he walks around every three hours. We keep one electric light burning in each room all night."

"It is difficult to suggest anything more—short of keeping your day watchers all night."

"We could not afford that."

"At least I should communicate with the police and have a special constable put on outside in Belmore Street," said I. "As to the letter, if the writer wishes to be anonymous, I think he has a right to remain so. We must trust to the future to show

some reason for the curious course he has adopted."

So we dismissed the subject but all that night after my return to my chambers I was puzzling my brain as to what possible motive Professor Andreas could have for writing an anonymous warning letter to his successor—for that the writing was his was as certain to me as if I had seen him actually doing it.

He foresaw some danger to the collection. Was it because he foresaw it that he had abandoned his charge of it? But if so, why should he hesitate to warn Mortimer in his own name? I puzzled and puzzled until at last I fell into a troubled sleep which carried me beyond my usual hour of rising.

I was aroused in a singular and effective method, for about nine o'clock my friend Mortimer rushed into my room with an expression of consternation upon his face. He was usually one of the most tidy men of my acquaintance but now his collar was undone at one end, his tie was flying, his hat at the back of his head. I read his whole story in his frantic eyes.

"The museum has been robbed!" I cried, springing up in bed.

"I fear so! Those jewels—the jewels of the urim and thummim!" he gasped, for he was out of breath with running. "I'm going on to the police-station. Come to the museum as soon as you can, Jackson! Goodbye!" He rushed distractedly out of the room and I heard him clatter down the stairs.

I was not long in following his directions but I found when I arrived that he had already returned with a police inspector and another elderly gentleman, who proved to be Mr. Purvis, one of the partners of Morson and Company, the well-known diamond merchants. As an expert in stones he was always prepared to advise the police.

They were grouped 'round the case in which the breastplate of the Hebrew priest had been exposed. The plate had been taken out and laid upon the glass top of the case and the three heads were bent over it closely.

"It is obvious that it has been tampered with," said Mortimer. "It caught my eye the moment that I passed through the room this morning. I examined it yesterday evening, so it is certain that this happened during the night."

It was, as he said, obvious that someone had been at work upon it. The settings of the uppermost row of four stones—the carnelian, peridot, emerald, and ruby—were rough and jagged as if someone had scraped all round them. The stones were in their places but the beautiful gold-work, which we had admired only a few days before, had been very clumsily pulled about.

"It looks to me," said the police inspector, "as if someone has been trying to take out the stones."

"My fear is," said Mortimer, "that he not only tried but succeeded. I believe these four stones to be skillful imitations which have been put in the place of the originals."

The same suspicion had evidently

been in the mind of the expert, for he had been carefully examining the four stones with the aid of a lens. He now submitted them to several tests and finally turned cheerfully to Mortimer.

"I congratulate you, sir," said he heartily. "I will pledge my reputation that all four of these stones are genuine and of a most unusual purity."

The color began to come back to my poor friend's frightened face and he drew a long breath of relief. "Thank God!" he cried. "Then what in the world did the thief want?"

"Probably he meant to take the stones but was interrupted."

"In that case you'd expect him to take them out one at a time. But the setting of each of these has been loosened, yet the stones are all here."

"It is certainly most extraordinary," said the inspector. "I can't remember a case like it. Let's see the watchman."

The commissionaire was called—a soldierly honest-faced man, who seemed as concerned as Ward Mortimer over the incident.

"No sir, I never heard a sound," he answered in reply to the questions of the inspector. "I made my rounds four times as usual—but I saw nothing suspicious. I've had this position ten years but nothing of the kind ever occurred before."

"No thief could have come through the windows?"

"Impossible, sir."

"Or passed you at the door?"

"No sir—I never left my post except when I walked my rounds."

"What other openings are there in the museum?"

"There's the door into Mr. Ward Mortimer's private rooms."

"That door is locked at night," my friend explained. "In order to reach it anyone from the street would have to open the outside door as well."

"Your servants?"

"Their quarters are separate."

"Well, well," said the inspector, "this is certainly obscure. However, there has been no harm done according to Mr. Purvis."

"I will swear that those stones are genuine."

"So the case appears to be merely one of malicious vandalism. But none the less I should be very glad to go carefully over the premises and see if we can find any trace to show us who your visitor may have been, Mr. Mortimer."

His investigation, which lasted all the morning, was careful and intelligent but it led in the end to nothing. He pointed out to us that there were two possible entrances to the museum he had not considered. One was from the cellars by a trap-door opening in the passage. The other through a skylight from the lumber-room, overlooking the very chamber to which the intruder had penetrated.

As neither the cellar nor the lumber-room could be entered unless the thief were already within the locked doors the matter was not of any practical importance and the dust of cellar and attic assured us

that no one had used either. Finally we ended as we began, without the slightest clue as to how, why or by whom the setting of these four jewels had been tampered with.

There remained one course for Mortimer to take and he took it. Leaving the police to continue their fruitless researches, he asked me to accompany him that afternoon in a visit to Professor Andreas. He took with him the two letters. It was his intention to tax his predecessor with having written the anonymous warning, then to ask him to explain the fact that he should have anticipated so exactly that which had actually occurred. The Professor was living in a small villa in Upper Norwood but we were informed by the servant that he was out. Seeing our disappointment she asked us if we should like to see Miss Andreas and showed us into the modest drawing-room.

I have mentioned that the Professor's daughter was a very beautiful girl. She was a blonde, tall and graceful, with a skin of that delicate tint which the French call *mat,* the color of old ivory or of the lighter petals of the sulphur rose. I was shocked, however, as she entered the room to see how much she had changed in the last fortnight.

Her young face was haggard and her bright eyes heavy with trouble. "Father has gone to Scotland," she said. "He looks tired and has had a good deal to worry him. He only left yesterday."

"You look a little tired yourself, Miss Andreas," said my friend.

"I have been so anxious about father."

"Can you give me his Scotch address?"

"Yes, he is with his brother, the Reverend David Andreas, One Arran Villas, Ardrossan."

Ward Mortimer made a note of the address and we left without saying anything as to the object of our visit. We found ourselves in Belmore Street that evening exactly where we had been in the morning. Our only clue was the Professor's letter and my friend had made up his mind to start for Ardrossan the next day, to get to the bottom of the anonymous letter, when a new development came to alter our plans.

Early the following morning I was roused from sleep by a tap on my bedroom door. It was a messenger with a note from Mortimer.

Do come 'round, it read, *the matter is becoming more and more extraordinary.*

When I obeyed his summons I found him pacing excitedly up and down the central room, while the old soldier who guarded the premises stood with military stiffness in a corner.

"My dear Jackson," he cried, "I am delighted you're here, for this is an inexplicable business."

"What's happened?"

He waved his hand towards the case which contained the breastplate. "Look at it," said he.

I did so and could not restrain a

cry of surprise. The settings of the middle row of precious stones had been profaned in the same manner as the upper ones. Of the twelve jewels eight had been now tampered with in this singular fashion. The settings of the lower four were neat and smooth—the others jagged and irregular.

"Have the stones been altered?" I asked.

"No, I'm certain they have not. I observed yesterday that little discoloration on the edge of the emerald. Since they have not extracted the upper stones there is no reason to think the lower have been transposed. You say you heard nothing, Simpson?"

"No sir," the commissionaire answered. "But when I made my round after daylight I had a special look at these stones and I saw at once that someone had been meddling with them. Then I called you, sir, and told you. I was backwards and forwards all the night and I never saw a soul or heard a sound."

"Come up and have some breakfast with me," said Mortimer and took me into his own chambers. "Now, what *do* you think of this, Jackson?" he asked.

"It is the most objectless futile idiotic business I ever heard of. It can only be the work of a monomaniac."

"Have you any theory?"

A curious idea came into my head. "This object is a Hebrew relic of great antiquity and sanctity," said I. "How about the anti-Semitic movement? Could one conceive that a fanatic of that way of thinking might desecrate—"

"No, no, *no!*" cried Mortimer. "That will never do! Such a man might push his lunacy to the length of destroying a Jewish relic—but why on earth should he nibble 'round every stone so carefully that he can only do four stones in a night?

"We must have a better solution than that and we must find it for ourselves, for I don't think our inspector is likely to help us. First of all, what do you think of Simpson, the porter?"

"Have you any reason to suspect him?"

"Only that he is the one person on the premises."

"But why should he indulge in such wanton destruction? Nothing has been taken away. He has no motive."

"Mania?"

"No, I'll swear to his sanity."

"Have *you* any theory?"

"Well, yourself, for example. You aren't a sleep-walker, by any chance?"

"Nothing of the sort, I assure you."

"Then I give up."

"But *I* don't—and I have a plan by which we will clear it up."

"To visit Professor Andreas?"

"No, our solution lies nearer than Scotland. Here's the plan. You know that skylight which overlooks the central hall? We'll leave the electric lights in the hall and keep watch in the lumber-room, you and

I, and solve the mystery for ourselves. If our mysterious visitor is doing four stones at a time he has four still to do. There is every reason to believe he'll return tonight and complete the job."

"Excellent!" I cried.

"We'll keep our own secret and say nothing either to the police or to Simpson. Will you join me?"

"With the utmost pleasure," said I—and so it was agreed.

It was ten o'clock that night when I returned to the Belmore Street Museum. Mortimer was in a state of suppressed nervous excitement but it was still too early to begin our vigil. So we remained for an hour or so in his chambers, discussing all the possibilities of the singular business.

At last the roaring stream of hansom cabs and the rush of hurrying feet became more intermittent as the pleasure-seekers passed on their way to their rendezvous or their homes. It was nearly twelve when Mortimer led the way to the lumber-room which overlooked the central hall of the museum.

He had visited it during the day and spread some sacking so that we could lie at our ease and look straight down into the museum. The skylight was of unfrosted glass but was so covered with dust that it would be impossible for anyone looking up from below to detect us.

We cleared a small piece at each corner, which gave us a complete view of the room beneath. In the cold white light of the electric lamps everything stood out hard and clear. I could see each smallest detail of the contents of the various cases.

Such a vigil is an excellent lesson, since one has no choice but to look hard at those objects which we usually pass with half-hearted interest. Through my litttle peep-hole I employed the hours studying every specimen, from the huge mummy-case which leaned against the wall to those very jewels which had brought us there, gleaming and sparkling in their glass case immediately beneath us.

There was much precious goldwork and many valuable stones scattered through the numerous cases—but the wonderful twelve which made up the urim and thummim glowed and burned with a radiance which far eclipsed the others. I studied in turn the tomb-pictures of Sciara, the friezes from Karnak, the statues of Memphis and the inscriptions of Thebes.

But my eyes would always come back to that wonderful Hebrew relic and my mind to the singular mystery which surrounded it. I was lost in the thought of it when my companion suddenly drew his breath sharply, and seized my arm in a convulsive grip. At the same instant I saw what had excited him.

I have said that against the wall —on the right-hand side of the doorway as we looked at it, there stood a large mummy-case. To our unutterable amazement it was slowly opening. Gradually the lid was swinging back and the black slit which marked the opening was

becoming wider and wider. So gently and carefully was it done that the movement was almost imperceptible.

Then, as we breathlessly watched it, a thin white hand appeared at the opening, pushing back the painted lid, then another hand, finally a face—that of Professor Martin Andreas. Stealthily he slunk out of the mummy-case, his head turning incessantly to left and to right, stepping, then pausing, then stepping again, the very image of craft and caution.

Once some sound in the street struck him motionless and he stood listening, ready to dart back to the shelter behind him. Then he crept onwards again on tiptoe, very very softly and slowly, until he had reached the case.

There he took a bunch of keys from his pocket, unlocked the case, took out the Hebrew breastplate and, laying it upon the glass in front of him, began to work upon it with some sort of small glistening tool. He was so directly underneath us that his bent head covered his work but we could guess from the movements of his hand that he was engaged in finishing the strange disfigurement he had begun.

I could realize from the heavy breathing of my companion the indignation that filled his heart as he saw this vandalism from the quarter of all others where he could least have expected it. He, the very man who a fortnight before had reverently bent over this unique relic, who had impressed its antiquity and its sanctity upon us, was now engaged in this outrageous profanation.

It was impossible, unthinkable—yet there, in the white glare of the electric light beneath us, was that dark figure with the bent grey head, and the twitching elbow. It was a relief to me when my companion tugged at my sleeve as a signal to follow him softly out of the room. Not until we were within his own quarters did he open his lips and then I saw by his agitated face how deep was his consternation.

"The abominable Goth!" he cried. "Could you have believed it?"

"It is amazing."

"He is a villain or a lunatic—one or the other. We shall very soon see which. Come with me, Jackson."

Having first kicked off our shoes we crept together through room after room until the large hall lay before us with that dark figure still stooping and working at the central case. With an advance as cautious as his own we closed in upon him—but softly as we moved we could not take him entirely unawares. We were still a dozen yards from him when he looked around with a start and, uttering a husky cry of terror, ran frantically down the museum corridor.

"Simpson! *Simpson!*" roared Mortimer and far away down the vista of electric lighted doors we saw the stiff figure of the old soldier appear. Profesor Andreas saw

him also and stopped running with a gesture of despair. At the same instant we each laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Yes, yes, gentlemen," he panted, "I will come with you. To your room, Mr. Ward Mortimer, if you please! I owe you an explanation.

My companion's indignation was so great that I could see he dared not trust himself to reply. We walked on either side of the old Professor, the astonished Simpson bringing up the rear. When we reached the violated case Mortimer stopped and examined the breastplate. Already one of the stones of the lower row had had its setting turned back in the same manner as the others. My friend held it up and looked angrily at his prisoner.

"How could you!" he cried.

Said the Professor, "I don't wonder at your feelings. Take me to your room."

"But this shall not be left exposed!" cried Mortimer. He picked the breastplate up and carried it tenderly in his hand, while I walked beside the Professor like a policeman with a malefactor.

We passed into Mortimer's chambers, leaving the amazed old soldier to comprehend matters as best he could. The Professor sat down in Mortimer's arm-chair, and turned so ghastly a color that for the instant all our resentment was changed to concern. A stiff glass of brandy brought the life back into him.

"These last few days have been too much for me," said Andreas. "I'm convinced I could not have stood it any longer. It is a nightmare—a horrible nightmare—that I should be arrested as a burglar in what has been for so long my own museum. And yet I cannot blame you. You could not have done otherwise. My hope was that I could get it over with before I was detected. This would have been my last night's work."

"How did you get in?" asked Mortimer.

"By taking a very great liberty with your private door. But my objective justified it. My objective justified everything. You will not be angry when you know everything—at least you will not be angry with me. I have keys to your side door, also to the museum door. I did not give them up when I left. So it wasn't difficult for me to let myself into the museum.

"I used to come in early before the crowd had cleared from the street. Then I hid myself in the mummy-case and took refuge there whenever Simpson came round. I could always hear him coming. I used to leave the same way."

"You ran a risk."

"I had to."

"But why? What on earth *was* your objective—*you* to do a thing like that!" Mortimer pointed reproachfully at the plate, which lay before him on the table.

"I had no alternative except a hideous public scandal and a private sorrow which would have clouded our lives. I acted for the best, incredible as it may seem to

you, and I only ask your attention to let me prove it."

"I'll hear what you have to say before I take any further steps," said Mortimer grimly.

"I am determined to take you both completely into my confidence. I'll leave it to your own generosity how far you'll act upon the facts I'm going to give you. Believe me that what I am about to say is the absolute and exact truth.

"You have met the person who calls himself Captain Wilson. I say 'calls himself' because I have reason now to believe that this is not his correct name. It would take me too long to describe the means by which he obtained an introduction to me and ingratiated himself into my friendship and the affection of my daughter.

"He brought letters from foreign colleagues which compelled me to show him some attention. And then by his own attainments, which are considerable, he succeeded in making himself a very welcome visitor at my rooms.

"When I learned that my daughter's affections had been gained by him I may have thought it premature, but I certainly was not surprised—for he had a charm of manner and of conversation which would have made him conspicuous in any society.

"He was much interested in Oriental antiquities and his knowledge of the subject justified his interest. Often when he spent the evening with us he would ask permission to go down into the museum and privately inspect the various specimens. I, as an enthusiast, was in sympathy with such a request, that I felt no surprise at the constancy of his visits.

"After his actual engagement to Elise there was hardly an evening he did not pass with us and an hour or two was generally devoted to the museum. He had the run of the place and when I was away for the evening I had no objection to his doing whatever he wished here. This state of things was only terminated by my resignation and retirement to Norwood, where I hoped for leisure to write a considerable work I had planned.

"It was immediately after this—within a week or so—that I first realized the true nature and character of the man I had so imprudently introduced into my family. The discovery came through letters from my friends abroad, which showed me that his introductions had been forgeries.

"Aghast at the revelation I asked myself what motive this man could have had in practicing this elaborate deception. Why had he come? I remembered that some of the most precious gems in Europe had been under my charge—and I remembered also the ingenious excuses by which this man had made himself familiar with the cases in which they were kept. He was a rascal who was planning some gigantic robbery.

"How could I, without striking my own daughter, who was infatuated about him, prevent his carry-

ing out any plan he might have conceived? My device was a clumsy one, yet I could think of nothing more effective. If I had written a letter under my own name you would naturally have turned to me for details which I did not wish to give. I resorted to an anonymous letter, begging you to be upon your guard.

"I may tell you that my change from Belmore Street to Norwood didn't affect the visits of this man, who has, I believe, a real and overpowering affection for my daughter. As to her, I could not believe a woman could fall so completely under the influence of a man as she. His stronger nature seemed entirely to dominate hers.

"I had not realized how far this was the case or the extent of the confidence which existed between them until the very evening when his true character for the first time was made clear to me. I had given orders that when he called he should be shown into my study instead of to the drawing-room.

"There I told him bluntly that I knew all about him, that I had taken steps to defeat his designs and that neither I nor my daughter desired ever to see him again. I added that I thanked God I had found him out before he had time to harm the precious objects which it had been the work of my life to protect.

"He was certainly a man of iron nerve. He took my remarks without a sign either of surprise or defiance but listened gravely and attentively until I had finished. Then he walked across the room without a word and struck the bell.

"'Ask Miss Andreas to be so kind as to step this way,' said he to the servant.

"My daughter entered and he closed the door behind her. Then he took her hand in his. "'Elise,' said he, 'your father has just discovered that I am a villain. He knows now what you knew before.'

"She stood in silence, listening.

"'He says that we are to part forever.'

"She did not withdraw her hand.

"'Will you be true to me, or will you remove the last good influence which is ever likely to come into my life?'"

"'John,' she cried, passionately, 'I will never abandon you! Never, *never*—not if the whole world were against you.'

"In vain I argued and pleaded with her. It was absolutely useless. Her whole life was bound up in this man. My daughter, gentlemen, is all that I have left to love and it filled me with agony when I saw how powerless I was to save her from ruin. My helplessness seemed to touch this man who was the cause of my trouble.

"'It may not be as bad as you think, sir,' said he in his quiet inflexible way. 'I love Elise enough to save even a man like myself. Just yesterday I promised her that never again in my whole life would I do a thing of which she would be ashamed. I have made up my mind to it and never yet did I

make up my mind to a thing which I did not do.'

"He spoke with an air that carried conviction. As he concluded he put his hand into his pocket and drew out a small cardboard box.

"'I am about to give you a proof of my determination,' said he. 'This, Elise, shall be the first fruits of your redeeming influence over me. You are right, sir, in thinking that I had designs upon the jewels in your possession. Such ventures have had a charm for me which depended as much upon the risk as upon the value of the prize. Those famous and antique stones of the Jewish priest were a challenge to my daring and ingenuity. I determined to get them.'

"'I guessed as much.'

"'There was only one thing you did not guess.'

"'And what's that?'

"'That I got them. They are in this box I am holding."

"He opened the box and tilted out the contents upon the corner of my desk. My hair rose and my flesh grew cold as I looked. There were twelve magnificent square stones, engraved with mystical characters. There could be no doubt that they were the jewels of the urim and thummim.

"'Good God!' I cried. 'How have you escaped discovery?'

"'By the substitution of twelve others, made especially to my order, in which the originals are so carefully imitated that I defy the eye to detect the difference.'

"'Then the present stones are false?' I cried.

"'They have been so for some weeks.'

"We stood in silence, my daughter white with emotion but still holding this man by the hand.

"'You see what I am capable of, Elise,' said he.

"'I see that you are capable of repentance and restitution,' she answered.

"'Yes, thanks to your influence! I leave the stones in your hands, sir. Do what you like about them. But remember that whatever you do against me is done against the future husband of your only daughter. You will hear from me soon again, Elise. It is the last time that I will ever cause you pain.' With these words he left both the room and the house.

"My position was a dreadful one. Here I was with these precious relics in my possession—and how could I return them without scandal and exposure? I knew the depth of my daughter's nature too well to suppose that I would ever be able to detach her from this man now that she had entirely given him her heart. I was not even sure how far it was right to detach her if she had such an ameliorating influence over him.

"How could I expose him without injuring her—and how far was I justified in exposing him when he had voluntarily put himself into my power? I thought and thought until at last I formed a resolution which may seem to you to be fool-

ish. And yet, if I had to do it again, I believe it would remain the one course open to me.

"My idea was to return the stones without anyone being the wiser. With my keys I could get into the museum at any time and I was confident I could avoid Simpson, whose hours and methods were familiar to me. I determined to take no one into my confidence—not even my daughter—whom I told I was about to visit my brother in Scotland.

"I wanted a free hand for a few nights, without inquiry as to my comings and goings. To this end I took a room in Harding Street that very day with an intimation that I was a journalist and would keep very late hours.

"That evening I made my way into the museum and replaced four of the stones. It was hard work and took me all night. When Simpson came around I always heard his footsteps and concealed myself in the mummy-case. I had some knowledge of gold-work but was far less skilful than the thief had been.

"He had replaced the setting so exactly that I defy anyone to see the difference. My work was rude and clumsy. However, I hoped that the plate might not be carefully examined or the roughness of the setting observed until my task was done. The next night I replaced four more of the stones.

"And tonight I should have finished my task had it not been for the unfortunate circumstance which has caused me to reveal so much that I wished to keep concealed. I appeal to you, gentlemen, to your senses of honor and compassion, whether what I have told you should go any farther or not. My own happiness, my daughter's future, the hopes of this man's regeneration—all depend upon your decision."

"Which is," said Ward Mortimer, "that all is well that ends well and that the whole matter ends here and at once. Tomorrow the loose settings shall be tightened by an expert goldsmith. So passes the greatest danger to which, since the destruction of the Temple, the urim and thummim has been exposed. Here is my hand, Professor Andreas, and I can only hope that under similar circumstances I would have carried myself as unselfishly and as well."

There is one footnote to this narrative. Within a month Elise Andreas was married to a man whose name, had I the indiscretion to mention it, would appeal to my readers as one who is now widely and deservedly honored. But if the truth were known that honor is due not to him but to the gentle girl who plucked him back when he had gone so far down that dark road along which few men return.

a murder of no importance

by . . . Morris Cooper

Mr. Murphy's nose, unlike Jenkins' ear, did not cause war. But it did lead to the discovery of a corpse.

MR. MURPHY'S claim to fame is quite secure, his right to the mantle of distinction based on two factors —he was the first to comment audibly on the *strangeness* of the odor —he did something about it.

On the evening in question his bulk rested on the concave seat of a mahogany rocking-chair, swaying gently backward and forward as an inducement to the swift digestion of boiled cabbage and pigs' knuckles. Despite the increasing heat Mr. Murphy was placidly content.

For this was the day O'Dellahenie & Sons Co., Wrecking & Salvage Specialists, had recognized his ability in the form of promotion to Assistant Foreman on Crew No. 3, plus a five dollar raise which the union specified as a mandatory adjunct of the new title.

The heat continued to permeate in the manner of an insidious drug until even Mr. Murphy was forced to give it more than scant attention. He began to speculate on the practicability of an air-conditioning unit. He fingered a slip of paper in his trouser pocket, then sighed and dismissed as folly the hope a dime entrusted to a character named Joe would be bread cast upon the waters and return as an electric fan.

Mercifully or otherwise, not many of us are ever actually on the inside of a murder case. By way of compensation we must seek our homicide vicariously in magazines such as this. But once in a great while an author is able to imbue a story with such utter realism that the vicarious is akin to the thing itself. Mr. Cooper has managed it brilliantly in this newly minted story of violent death in one of our big cities.

Mr. Murphy wished Moxie would return. The few times he had added a question with his dime contribution to Joe the reply had been the same. "Don't know when Moxie will be back. Told me to take care of his customers."

Mr. Murphy smiled as he thought of Moxie. He was like an overgrown kid, though he must be around thirty, and his brain hadn't aged since its seventh year. Which, of course, was why the smart boys had tagged him "Moxie." It was doubtful now if anyone, Moxie included, remembered his right name.

Moxie had a dream and Mr. Murphy, when ever he played his dime, never forgot to ask, "Still taking those dollar chances, Moxie?"

"Sure thing, mister," Moxie would reply seriously, "an' when I hit I'll have six-hunnert and I'm gonna get on the biggest boat they got and go all around the world." Then he'd nod vaguely and shuffle away, the handless stump of his left arm thrust into the pocket of an old jacket.

The heat continued to surge in, drowning Mr. Murphy's memories. A straining T-shirt sweated against his breast. Perspiration rolled down the front, beads of translucent watery tapioca cast adrift against the background of a tired restaurant tablecloth.

He always regretted his failure to note the exact time—for it was precisely this instant that Mr. Murphy's nostrils gave their famous twitch.

Mr. Murphy was moved to investigate. He bent forward in the rocking-chair, thrusting an alerted sensory organ and as much of his head as was needed to keep it in position through the open window.

The odor threatened to gag him but Mr. Murphy controlled himself as he examined the familiar scene. To his left the outer wall of the three-story house appeared its usual self, unmarred save by the windows which constituted an important adjunct of Mr. Murphy's railroad flat.

Mr. Murphy looked upward toward the Sanchez flat, then down to where the Myers lived below—and saw nothing wrong.

His eyes quested to the right, past a rusted rain pipe and the light streaming from Mrs. Murphy's kitchen, and saw nothing wrong as far as the mean alley fronting the house. He glanced at the drain pipe again. The holes he had noticed last month were larger now, and light from the kitchen danced through them like filtered stars. He made a mental note to mention it the next time Mr. Tinkbury came around for his rent.

He traced the descending route of the rain drain until it edged out with a slight curving flair an inch above the ground. Then his eyes lifted slowly as they examined the empty lots which abutted the house and extended almost a full block in the direction of the river.

Moonlight drowned the brick-pitted lots but Mr. Murphy felt none of the enchantment. His experienced eye recognized ground-

sags where foundation excavations and cellars had been improperly filled after the buildings were razed. They had been demolished before Mr. Murphy moved into the neighborhood, a fact he often regretted, since he was certain he could have snared the contract for O'Dellahenie & Sons had he been nearby.

Sometimes, when he had need of asserting his dominance, he pointed out the sloppiness of the job—the protruding pipes and spikes of foundation timbers and steels that pointed upward in spots, ineffectually concealed by a debris of broken bricks and an accumulation of weather-aged tin cans and shattered bottles.

A fanning-rustle captured his ear and his eyes turned again toward the opening made by the Murphy kitchen. The bosomed Mrs. Murphy was leaning outward, her pudgy hands choking the dust from a mop.

Mr. Murphy drew his head back into the front room, his nose twitching in frantic urgency. The odor, whatever it was, began to fill him with a sense of uneasiness.

He waited until he heard Mrs. Murphy move and then he shouted, "Nora, don't you know the law forbids the throwing of trash from windows? Besides which," he added a bit testily and in a slightly lower tone, "I'm after wondering what morsels left from my supper could smell so."

"What?" The question and the opening of the kitchen door came at the same moment. Mrs. Murphy bulked in the doorway, a five-foot amazon, the apron under her bosom suggesting a handkerchief impressed into duty as an emergency tent. "You know I can't hear a word with the sink runnin' and the door closed. And if it's beer you're after wanting you got feet that know the way to the ice-box well enough."

"I wasn't thinking of beer though the idea is not bad. I merely observed that garbage should not be thrown out the window—especially smelly garbage."

"And who's been accusin' me of that?" Mrs. Murphy set sail across a sea of lemon-green rug.

"Now, Nora," chided Mr. Murphy from the security of his chair, "ain't I just after seein' you do that very thing."

"Fah!" Mrs. Murphy scuffed to a halt in front of her spouse's throne. "That was only a bit of harmless dust."

"Will you be telling me then what that smell is?"

"Smell?" Mrs. Murphy sniffed a cubic foot of humid air, somewhat after the exploring manner of a suspicious bull. Her mouth opened to expedite the exhalation process and, being open, she saw no economy in shutting it silently. "Since when have you started gettin' so delicate?" A loose bridge clicked sardonically.

Mr. Murphy was not in a mood to appreciate sarcasm, subtle or otherwise. He asserted his considered opinion with a slight edge of vehemence. "This here is a *strange*

smell." Then plaintively, "Honest, Nora, I ain't kiddin'. Y'mean you can't even get a whiff of it?"

Mrs. Murphy shrugged, activating seventy pounds of shoulder into rippling motion. "Uh-uh, Murph. 'Course, I have got a little cold and cookin' cabbage all afternoon has maybe dulled my smeller a little. So I ain't sayin' there ain't something around that couldn't maybe stand a good bath."

"It's terrible," said Mr. Murphy. And lest she should mistake the cause of his commiseration, added, "The stink, I mean."

The heat continued without abatement. It is a matter of proveable fact that, as Mr. Murphy became fond of pointing out whenever he retold the tale, a record was broken on this particular August 19th which had held undisputed and inviolable laurels in the archives of the Weather Bureau since August 19th, 1911.

Mr. Murphy didn't doze off until midnight, a full two hours past his usual week-night bedtime. He lay uneasily, refusing to speculate on the unearthly horror which might be the root of *that* smell.

There was a certain comfort in the proximity of his wife's majestic bulk, undulating in the manner of a protective wall between him and the outer night. He was grateful for her nearness, even though she had peppered him with sly remarks all evening and then deserted him by the simple expediency of falling asleep.

Mrs. Murphy snored in placid serenity, her familiar timbre ranging from a baritone D to an alto low-E, her lips slightly parted and halted in flight. Mr. Murphy watched the fine black hairs on her upper lip as they swayed in a cadence commanded by the expulsions of carbon dioxide from her nostrils. As Mr. Murphy watched the hairs were transfigured into strange, alien forms, trembling and dancing with wild abandon.

A sea-serpent, heavy and clammy moist, coiled about him in silent, demoniac fury, dragging him beneath lapping waves, trying to carry him to the ocean floor.

His eyes opened in feeble defense and the ocean became sweat-drenched bedding and the serpent was Mrs. Murphy's strong right arm tugging at his shoulder. "Wha'sa matter?" Sleep, which had eluded him so long, now tried to keep a hold on his tired brain.

Sitting up in bed, Mrs. Murphy was an opaque mountain around which only a glimmer of confused moonlight could creep.

"There *is* something out there," she said in an awed voice. And as though she had not belittled her husband's adjective all evening, "It's something *strange*." The impatient echo of a hard-puffing tugboat's horn drifted from the river, putting a hollow period at the end of her statement.

Mr. Murphy reared and became a smaller mountain at his wife's side. His throat was dry, strangling, and he gasped in an attempt to gulp

in precious air. Mr. Murphy swung his feet over the side of the bed.

"Where you going?" Mrs. Murphy demanded instantly.

"I," announced Mr. Murphy as he headed for the hallway, "am going to telephone the police."

"Cops? Why should we want any cops?"

"Why—*why?*" He paused in the doorway. "Because there's poison gas out there somewhere, that's why."

"You're nuts!" Mrs. Murphy yelled and then held her breath apprehensively, thinking bitterly of a nose which had chosen such an inopportune moment to rid itself of a cold.

"Yah!" Mr. Murphy returned his wife's compliment, switched on the hall light and waddled to the telephone.

A bored desk sergeant listened, suggested with the resigned patience born of long experience, "Why don't you go to bed and sleep it off, buddy. This is too hot a night for jokes."

"Who's joking?" Mr. Murphy sputtered indignantly. "Look, if you flatfeet ain't got guts enough to face a little poison gas, say so and I'll try the marines!"

The sergeant counted to ten silently before answering. "Okay," he said softly, "what's your name and address?"

Mr. Murphy supplied the details and hung up . . .

A bewildering panorama exploded into action, churning Mr. Murphy in its vortex. Emergency vehicles clogged the front streets and the back streets and arc lamps and truck-mounted searchlights embraced the empty lots with a blanket of artificial suns.

At five o'clock in the morning an excited shout came from one of a group of diggers. Men hurried over to lend aid in deepening an already gaping excavation. Other men took new measurements and more photos. A fussy little man called Doc went down. When he climbed out, he nodded curtly.

Ropes were lowered. Mr. Murphy winced as he heard the raspy crying tear of half-rotted pipes.

Mr. Murphy watched as the ropes were raised. Mr. Murphy watched as a molded earth-encrusted tarpaulin-wrapped object was lifted from the pit. Mr. Murphy watched as it was laid on a patch of canvas-covered ground. Mr. Murphy watched as men took more pictures and other men opened the rotted tarpaulin.

And Mr. Murphy saw the *thing!*

He was a beaten man when he finally managed to crawl up the stairs and into his flat. He was wide-eyed, with a new emptiness in his stomach, and all the curiosity had been drained from him.

Mrs. Murphy tended him gently. At his insistence she promised to phone O'Dellahenie & Sons and inform them their new Assistant Foreman would not be in to work that day. After which he allowed her to tuck him into bed. She cooed softly, stroked his brow and before he drifted into a blessed darkness

Mrs. Murphy managed to coax Mr. Murphy's tongue into revealing what he had seen.

"A body . . ." The tongue trembled against his teeth and the words came out in a chattering whisper. "A human body . . . dead . . . it had to be dead . . . there wasn't any head or hands . . . only a lot of white . . . crawling . . ."

At which providential point he mercifully drifted off. His eyes rolled and he acquired a lax limpness. Mr. Murphy had either fallen asleep or fainted. Mrs. Murphy, however, was not in a condition to check.

Mr. Murphy's descriptive words still lingered in her ears when she returned from the bathroom, shaken but feeling that perhaps she might live after all. Her face had a greyish-pallor and her mouth sucked air greedily as she crawled into bed and finally joined her husband in a troubled sleep.

But not before she made certain each door and window in the house was securely locked and bolted and safely fastened tight.

II

Mrs. Murphy recovered by noon. Mr. Murphy, being a man, was not so fortunate. It was almost seven o'clock before he found the strength to lift himself from bed. His memory whirled with a confusion of voices and flashing lights and questions.

Mr. Murphy made one cautious test before he got out of bed—he sniffed gently. But there no longer was any odor.

He spent the evening in his rocking chair. Though the intense heat of yesterday had gone it was still warm. Yet Mr. Murphy was cold. Ever so often he felt the touch of icy sweat on his forehead and his body shivered involuntarily.

At 8:00 P.M. Mrs. Murphy tuned in a news program. Mr. Murphy paid no heed to an imploring voice begging him to try SMOKETTS, THE CIGARETTE WITHOUT TOBACCO AND WITHOUT SMOKE. He perked his ears a bit when the broadcaster began speaking of the murder.

". . . has not been identified. The victim was a man about six feet in height. It has not yet been determined how he met his death or when the body was buried.

"One curious aspect which is still a mystery is how the odor of decomposition, which caused John Francis Murphy, demolition expert, to report the matter to the authorities, got into his river-front apartment.

"A'hamid A'dwala, local mystic, has a suggestion which I pass along without comment. Swami A'dwala is of the opinion Mr. Murphy may be a kindred soul of the dead, which would account for the fact of his being chosen as an instrument to bring this message of murder to the attention of the living."

At this moment Mr. Murphy turned to his wife. "I'm sick, Nora," he said plaintively and fainted.

Dr. Littmann was cheery while they awaited the arrival of an am-

bulance. "Nothing to worry about, Mrs. Murphy. Just an acute nasal infection, complicated by a set of adenoids and tonsils which should have been removed long ago. We'll have him fixed up in no time."

Five days later Mr. Murphy left the hospital after promising Dr. Littmann he would not return to work for at least a week.

Mrs. Murphy welcomed him home gayly. Mr. and Mrs. Myer said hello. Even Mr. Sanchez stopped by with a curt nod.

When he inquired about the corpse that had been found beneath their noses Mrs. Murphy shrugged both shoulders. "A foul ball," she said elegantly. "But you should hear about the latest murder case, Murph. It's a lulu."

Upon which she proceeded graphically to supply the details he had missed while vacationing in the hospital . . .

The following morning a tall thin man came around and introduced himself as Detective (third grade) Michael Jorgensen. He inquired after Mr. Murphy's health, then asked, "You know of anyone who's missing in the neighborhood?"

"Not offhand. Better ask my wife."

"I already have."

"Oh." Mr. Murphy sat silently, absently fingering a slip of paper in his pocket. Finally he took it out, stared at it, stared at the detective, stared back at the slip—and then gave a guilty start that set the rocking-chair to swaying.

Detective Jorgensen laughed and Mr. Murphy grinned sheepishly.

"Hit 'em often?" the detective asked.

"Uh-uh. Not once."

"I did, twice. You got a system?"

"Sort of. I use the month and day, like on this one. August nineteenth—eight-nineteen." Mr. Murphy grimaced. "That's a date I'll never forget."

"You check that number yet?"

"Uh-uh."

"I think maybe you finally picked yourself a winner."

"Yeah? Guess the sight of all you cops has kept the runner away."

"I'm the only cop around."

Mr. Murphy stopped rocking. "You mean you're working on this case all by yourself?"

"In a manner of speaking. It looks like an unimportant murder."

Mr. Murphy was shocked. "I thought murder was always important."

"Now don't get me wrong. If anything does turn up Homicide can sink its teeth into they'll go after it whole-hog. And the case will stay open on the books until it's solved. But there's just so many cops, no matter how many crimes we got, and the powers-that-be have to pick which ones to concentrate on."

Mr. Murphy shook his head.

Detective Jorgenson smiled at Mr. Murphy. "Don't take it so hard. If there's anything around I'll latch onto it. But to get back to your system, y'know I use the same one, only backward. I had 918

that day, which is why I think I remember you picked a winner."

"Hope you're right." Mr. Murphy brightened. "Anyway, if I did hit, I guess Moxie's still holding the dough."

"Moxie?"

"He's the runner."

"Those boys like a winner. Gives the suckers confidence."

"Yeah. Besides, Moxie wouldn't . . ." Mr. Murphy stopped, then continued thoughtfully, "Y'know, I just remembered. I didn't play with Moxie. Been playin' with Joe ever since Moxie's been gone."

"What d'you mean, *gone?* And who's Joe?"

Mr. Murphy told what he knew about the missing runner.

Detective Jorgenson was interested in the fact Moxie had no left hand. "I think I'll have a talk with Joe."

"He don't know anything. I asked him."

"Maybe. But he might be holding something back. In which case I'll run him in and then we'll find out if he can talk or not."

"Arrest him?" Mr. Murphy inquired. "But don't you have to charge him with something? I mean, just because Moxie's missing don't mean . . ." His voice trailed off.

"Didn't say it did. As for chargin' this Joe," Detective Jorgenson added solemnly, "numbers *is* still against the law."

Mr. Murphy maintained a discreet silence . . .

Joe was found, Mr. Murphy collected six-hundred to one—fifty dollars, actually, since the runner kept ten as his commission—and Detective Jorgenson asked some questions.

But Joe insisted he knew no more than he had told Mr. Murphy.

"I got a fat hunch," Detective Jorgensen said as he walked Mr. Murphy home. "Joe's holding out plenty. But I think maybe I oughta find out a little more before I put the hooks into him. He'll keep."

"Find out what?"

"Well, it might be kinda nice to know if this Moxie is really missin'. And if he is, *who* is he?"

"Everybody calls him Moxie."

"I'll bet his mother didn't."

"His mother?" Mr. Murphy was slightly startled. It had never occurred to him Moxie might have had the same biological inception as the rest of the human race.

Detective Jorgensen prodded Mr. Murphy in the side. "Here's where you live." He grinned.

"Oh." Mr. Murphy grinned back sheepishly.

"Take it easy. Be seein' you."

The following afternoon Detective Jorgensen returned to the Murphy establishment. Mr. Murphy let him in—his wife had gone to a china-matinée at the local theatre.

"I," the detective announced as he followed Mr. Murphy into the front room, "have found out where this Moxie lived."

"Where?"

The detective pulled a straight-backed chair across the lemon-green rug and sat next to the rocker.

"Y'know that abandoned warehouse on the river front? The old Garrett Storage outfit?"

Mr. Murphy nodded. "Ain't been used for about twenty years."

"Twenty-five. Moxie had a little place fixed up in back. Even the beat cop didn't know he was usin' the joint. Couldn't tell much from the odds and ends of clothing in the place."

"I never seen him wearing anything new."

"Well, could be that's his complete outfit, then. But I did find something really interesting."

"What?"

"A calendar."

"A calendar?" Mr. Murphy's echo was a combination of puzzlement and disappointment. "I got a calendar. I guess nearly everybody's got at least one."

"This calendar has numbers marked in for each day."

"Don't all of 'em . . .? Oh, you mean written in?"

"Yeah, for the whole year. Those up to July fourteenth are scratched out."

"I still don't get it."

"The number written in for July fourteenth was a policy winner."

"Say," Mr. Murphy said excitedly, "Moxie had a habit of playin' a dollar a number."

"Then I guess he hit."

Mr. Murphy chuckled and settled back in his chair. "It's okay."

"What's okay?"

"Well, Moxie always planned on takin' a trip around the world. Guess that's what he did if he hit."

"Maybe," said Detective Jorgensen. "But it'd have to be an awfully short trip on six hundred dollars."

"Yeah," Mr. Murphy pondered. "Anyway it's somethin' to check."

Mr. Murphy stood up. "Bottle of beer?"

"Thanks."

Mr. Murphy got two bottles and an opener from the ice-box. The detective pried the metal cap off, took a long, breathless-swallow and smacked his lips appreciatively. After which he stated quite casually, "The lab boys finally figured how come that smell was so strong in here."

"Yes?"

"First," said Detective Jorgensen, "I'm really convinced the body we dug up is Moxie."

"You are?" Mr. Murphy blinked his eyes. Where along his mental path he had accepted the corpse as being Moxie he did not know. But he had accepted it as a valid fact. Indeed, he would have been amazed at any reversal of identity.

"Yep. I told the assistant medical examiner about Moxie and mentioned he had one hand missing. The doc said that fully explained certain muscle, nerve and bone conditions in the left arm. I ain't up on all that medical stuff."

Mr. Murphy nodded vague agreement. "Guess whoever done it was worried about Moxie bein' shy a hand."

"Yeah. It would explain why the murderer went to the trouble of dismemberment after death."

Mr. Murphy could contain himself no longer. "What about the smell?"

"Oh, that—well, I ain't up on all the technicalities but I guess I can explain it good enough for you to get the drift."

Mr. Murphy listened avidly. Some time later Detective Michael Jorgensen brought around a complete copy of the Chief Medical Examiner's findings and Mr. Murphy was better enabled to understand what had happened.

III

The Chief Medical Examiner had dictated an impressive report on his findings, which was later printed and bound in the City Printing Office and discreetly distributed to sundry medical, legal and medico-legal individuals and organizations in the Western and—within limits—Eastern hemispheres.

He had also dictated a secondary (and much simplified) report for the convenience of His Honor the Mayor, the newspapers, the Police Department and certain other peoples and institutions whose continued existence from a functional viewpoint was, in his opinion, debatable. But whose continued existence from a practical viewpoint was necessary to insure the office of Chief Medical Examiner with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereunto.

It was this secondary report from which Detective Michael Jorgensen quoted—and later showed—to Mr. Murphy.

After considering numerous factors, including the contributions of several scale-charts indicating in epicurean succession the types of entomological life forms which may progressively attack a decomposing cadaver, the Medical Examiner's Office—in the person of the Chief Medical Examiner—reached a qualified opinion that the corpse interred in Mr. Murphy's back lot had ceased being a living entity approximately one month before its official discovery.

The amateurish dismemberment of several anatomical portions of the cadaver, while a hindrance in establishing both the victim's identity and exact cause of death, nevertheless was of prime importance in the series of events which subsequently transpired.

Equally important, in this particular instance, the process of decomposition was begun almost immediately following interment in the water-filled grave.

Decomposition proceeded with greater rapidity than would have been the case had the body been emaciatingly lean. The continual dampness of the soil, due to the unusual almost daily thundershowers during most of July and the first half of August, was an extremely vital contributing factor to the speed of decomposition. It was further accelerated by the absence of any drainage and by the extremely warm weather, which kept the temperature of the water in the grave at a constant high level.

As a result of these and other

contributory technicological causes a substance known as *adipocere* began to form on the corpse. The creation of *adipocere* is due to chemical changes involving body fat. This substance, moreover, forms most rapidly in the presence of warm weather and warm water—under ideal conditions it may develop in a few short weeks.

And adipocere *has an exceedingly foul and rancid odor!*

Concurrent to the creation of *adipocere* and as a result of bacterial action within the body, the formation of gas was begun. Thus the chain of events was begun.

The continual and unrelieved pressure of water, augmented tremendously in this instance by the considerable weight-sag of rain-wetted earth, tended toward a more than usually rapid compression of gas within the abdominal and chest cavities of the corpse.

Again, as in the creation of *adipocere,* the length of time required for the formation and concentration of an enormous quantity of gas due to decay and putrefaction, depends in great part on the amount of fat in the body and warm climate. Under such ideal and advantageous conditions the development will occur with extreme rapidity and in egregious quantities.

Confined as it is by barriers of bone and decaying flesh, and denied a normal effusion, the pressure potential of the gas becomes terrific.

Eventually this tremendous compression of gas chose, as a primary escape route from its parent body, the convenient opening left by an absent head.

Freed of its restricting confines, the gas met and mingled with the rancid exuviations of the freshly formed *adipocere.* But the released pressure continued its search for a broader means of escape.

Then, almost when it seemed doomed to an unheralded dissipation in the soaked dank soil, the newly created gas-propelled odor discovered the underground plumbing left by careless wrecking crews.

Gayly it sped through the most accomodating pipe. Though some was channeled into bypaths, the greater amount flowed on in the manner of an underground stream, unrestrained, until suddenly the course turned upward and it was liberated from the grave via an open end of half-inch pipe protruding above the brick-littered surface of the lot.

But liberty was a short-lived illusion. Before it could check the momentum of its drive and disperse to enjoy its newly found freedom, another trap spread a yawning maw. The protruding half-inch pipe was directly beneath the curved and flared opening of the bottom of a rain drain and the foul *adipocere-gaseous* admixture shot into it like fine spray driven through a nozzle.

Up the drain pipe the odor drifted, becoming slow and listless because it lacked the driving force of accompanying pressure. And yet it was not capable of quietly halting and settling earthward. Halfway up the pipe, now wearily air-borne, it

spied some of the rust-etched holes of which Mr. Murphy meant to speak the next time Mr. Tinkbury called for his rent.

Through these holes it seeped, following the beckoning light which blinked from a conveniently open window. It drifted into the Murphys' front room and there, almost completely inert and buoyed by the teeming heat, the odor was content at last to relax.

Detective Michael Jorgensen added a final silent sentence, which he felt certain the Chief Medical Examiner would have heartily appreciated. "It was at this point Mr. Murphy's nostrils gave their first famous twitch."

IV

Mrs. Myer inadvertently supplied the missing tangible which enabled Detective Jorgensen to complete the puzzle.

He had formed the pleasant habit of visiting the Murphys on his free evenings. Detective Jorgensen, without quite realizing it, was a lonely man. His wife had been dead for more than ten years and his only daughter was married and living in Tucson.

The two men, as often happens, became friends almost from their first meeting. And, in the course of these evening visits, he kept Mr. Murphy abreast of the progress being made on the Moxie Case. Mr. Murphy, keenly gratified at being on the *inside of things,* sifted and pondered each additional facet of information he heard and then discussed the pros and cons with Detective Jorgensen.

Mrs. Murphy, however, while she also was fond of the detective, had none of the continual and avid eagerness which imbued her husband. This case was moving far too slowly for her tastes and the evening conversations held in the front room began to remind her of a never-ending radio serial, called *Murph & Mike,* where the problems were never resolved.

But because it would have proved irksome to discover she had missed some juicy tid-bit Mrs. Murphy made periodic listening-trips to the front room. She would dally just long enough to catch the trend and then wander away again, generally to Mrs. Myer's kitchen, where, over a cup of coffee and some honey cake, she was able to keep her neighbor informed of the shameful and continued inefficiency of the police in solving the crime.

Detective Jorgensen, acting on Mr. Murphy's information that the missing Moxie was possessed of an unfulfilled ambition to become a world traveler, began a systematic check of all travel agencies. It was slow dull work but Detective Jorgensen persisted.

He finally found an agency employing an understanding clerk who remembered Moxie quite well, though he did not know his name. This clerk had suggested a round-trip to the Mediterranean on a passenger-freighter might make him as happy as a deluxe voyage around the world. Moxie accepted the sug-

gestion with apparent eagerness. When the clerk mentioned the need of a passport Moxie left, obviously to acquire one.

And there the trail came to a temporary halt. "Heck, Murph," he said one evening, "I don't even know his real name."

"I wonder," mused Mr. Murphy, "if Moxie knew what a passport was?"

"I thought of that." Detective Jorgensen beamed at this evidence of his friend's sagacity. "I nosed around at the Customs Building but no soap."

Mr. Murphy was still clucking over his friend's predicament as he disrobed, preparatory to retiring for the night. "Poor Mike," he commiserated. "This case is really giving him a headache."

"Yah!" muttered Mrs. Murphy with complete lack of sympathy. "Mike's just like the rest of you men when it comes to tellin' what somebody looks like. Instead of all this malarkey, why don't he just get a picture of this Moxie character? Somebody'd be bound to recognize him then. From the way you been describing him he could be like a dozen people I see every day."

Mr. Murphy rushed to defend the male. "I suppose all of 'em got no left hand?"

"You said yourself," she pointed out triumphantly, "he generally kept the stump stuck in his coat pocket."

"And where," asked Mr. Murphy sarcastically, "is Mike supposed to get this picture?"

Mrs. Murphy snorted. "Why ask me?" And added with womanly logic, "He's the detective. *I* ain't."

Whereupon Mrs. Murphy fell asleep. And after a few futile ponderings on the inscrutable and mysterious vagaries of the female mind, Mr. Murphy joined her in slumber.

Aided perhaps by the salutary effects of two cold lamb sandwiches and a large pickle consumed rather rapidly fifteen minutes prior to his retirement, Mr. Murphy began to dream.

It was a confused dream, wherein he was pursued by shimmering drain pipes and taunting pictures and fluttering policy slips and taunting pictures and dancing calendars and taunting pictures and wavering passports and taunting pictures. Tiring of the endless pursuit Mr. Murphy halted, faced his assailants and inquired in a loud, determined voice, "What are you chasing me for?"

The abrupt question dispelled his pursuers and woke him at the same time. He sat up, the figures of his dream still a vivid reality. And he had an idea! He lay back, smiling, and his elbow accidentally jabbed Mrs. Murphy.

She roused herself wearily, disgusted by the shortness of the night, then realized it was still dark. "What," she demanded indignantly, "did you wake me for?"

"I'm sorry. Didn't mean to bump you."

"How come you're up? Don't tell me you're sick again?"

"No. Just thinking."

"About what if I might ask?"

"Oh, quite a number of things."

"Yah!" And then what psychologists call an association of terms prodded her memory. "That reminds me. I heard you hit a number but I ain't seen none of the dough you won yet."

Mr. Murphy growled inaudibly. Mrs. Murphy chuckled and went back to sleep, smugly content with this reassurance from a provident fate that protects and guides the destinies of all good wives . . .

Mrs. Murphy held her hand out the next morning. Mr. Murphy gave her the fifty dollars without comment and then recalled the idea which had come to him after his dream.

He called Detective Jorgensen's precinct. The detective wasn't in yet, so Mr. Murphy left a message for him.

Detective Jorgensen smiled when he received the message—the same thought had occurred to him that morning. But never, by word or deed did he let Mr. Murphy know that he did not deserve full and complete credit for the clue.

Bolstered by Mr. Murphy's helpfulness Detective Jorgensen began his rounds. Mr. Murphy's telephone message had been short but illuminating—"Maybe somebody told him he needed a picture for a passport and he went to some studio to get one taken."

Detective Jorgensen did not start with studios of photography. Instead he began a routine check of riverfront arcades specializing in quick prints for licenses and applications of various sorts.

On the third try he struck paydirt.

Moxie's name was William X. Harrison.

"Told him he hadda have a name if he wanted a passport," the baldheaded paunch-balanced proprietor told the detective. "Remember because it took the joker so long to remember." He eyed the detective thoughtfully. "Come to think of it, could be it's a phoney. He took long enough to make up a dozen names."

"Don't think so. Anyway, that's not so important. What I want to know is if you've got an extra print."

"Sure thing. Keep the negative and a copy for maybe a year or so. Lots of times people come back for extras and it's gravy for me." He rummaged through a crowded file. "Let's see. July, I guess it must of been. Or was it June?"

"July," said the detective. "Try the last couple of weeks."

"Check." The wilted toothpick hanging from a corner of his mouth waved excitedly as he kept up a running monologue. "Asked this character what the X stood for and what d'you think he said? You'd never guess. Told me it was his father's name.

"Haw! I said it was kinda funny, just havin' a'nitial for a monicker, but he said he was positive that was his father's name. And y'know why? 'Cause that's the way the old man used to sign his name—with'n X.

"Can you tie that? And take it from me this character don't sound like he was kiddin' neither. Take it from me he could maybe have a couple rocks in his head. Yeah! Here it is. July sixteenth."

Detective Jorgensen took the two-by-two photo and, for the first time since he was assigned this case, saw the face of the victim. He stared into the vacant and friendly features of Moxie William X. Harrison. He saw why Mr. Murphy could have been fond of this man who had never grown up.

A winner on July 14th. A picture on July 16th. And death on . . .? It couldn't have been much later. Detective Jorgensen was vaguely irritated at the thought that Moxie hadn't got the chance to sail on his beloved oceans.

"Remember anything else?" he asked the proprietor.

"Naw. Say, what did this character do?"

"You got a reason for asking?" The detective eyed him coldly.

"Naw! Honest, I never saw the character before in my life." He debated the advisibility of charging for the photo and decided against it. "Keep the picture. It's on the house," he said magnanimously. "Besides, the guy paid me for half a dozen."

"Got any idea why he wanted so many?"

"Search me. I guess maybe it's the first time in his life he ever got a picture took. Was as proud as a kid with a new toy. Even stuck one away in his checkbook."

"What type of a checkbook?"

"Well, now," the proprietor became cautious again and wary, not knowing what he might be sticking his neck into. "I ain't sayin' it was a checkbook but it sure looked like one. Y'know the kind I mean—one of them paper folders that looks like imitation leather. Y'get 'em at the bank. Anyway he stuck a picture inside the little slot where you put the tab they got on the end of a book of blank checks."

Detective Jorgensen questioned him for a half-hour but learned nothing else. When he left the arcade, Detective Jorgensen made another trip to the passport office. The files showed no record of an application from a William X. Harrison and none of the clerks recognized Moxie's picture.

The same story was repeated as Detective Jorgensen doggedly tramped from bank to bank. No William X. Harrison on record, either for a checking or savings account. No tellers saw anything familiar in Moxie's features—neither did any of the clerks who attended to the formality of opening new accounts. Two banks had depositors named William Harrison but both men were well known to the officials and obviously had no relationship with Moxie.

It was here that Mrs. Myer supplied the missing tangible. Mrs. Murphy was giving her version of events. Mr. Murphy was forced to listen to the highly inaccurate account since it would have been impolite to stalk suddenly from the

room without an excuse. He was trying to think of an adequate one when Mrs. Myer shook her head lugubriously.

"Never—never would I do that. You could find money in the street quicker than you could cash a check unless you are well known. And if you are going to travel, how can you be so sure you will meet somebody you know who will cash a check for you? No! The best thing to do is like my Bert says. Time and time he told me there is only one way to carry money if you are traveling." She smiled contentedly.

"Well?" demanded Mr. Murphy. "What's this smart way Bert got figured out?"

"Traveler's checks," Mrs. Myer replied complacently. "Just like cash, Bert says."

Mr. Murphy had found the excuse he needed to leave the room. He phoned Detective Jorgensen and told him about the possibility of someone having told Moxie to buy traveler's checks. Mr. Murphy gave Mrs. Myer full credit for the suggestion.

Detective Jorgensen said, "Swell." He smiled wryly to himself. Should have come up with that by himself, he thought. He must be getting old —or maybe just tired.

And so began another weary round of checking. But before the day was ended he discovered that Moxie, alias William X. Harrison, had purchased six-hundred dollars' worth of traveler's checks.

Detective Jorgensen headed down the home stretch.

V

On July 16th, the same day he had his photograph taken, Moxie had purchased sixty ten-dollar traveler's checks. The first was cashed July 30th, others with almost daily frequency until August 20th, the date on which the newspapers carried the first story about the discovery of an unidentified corpse in Mr. Murphy's back lot. No checks were cashed after that until September 1st. On September 1st a check was cashed again. Since then other checks had been redeemed.

By the time Detective Jorgensen discovered William X. Harrison and his traveler's checks five-hundred and thirty dollars of the original six-hundred dollars purchased had been turned in. All had been cashed at small stores within a radius of five miles.

The original signature on the top of each check was scrawled in immature almost block-like lettering. Handwriting experts, from both the Police Department and the issuing agency, examined the counter-signatures on the redeemed checks. The original signatures were so childish as to be easily imitated. The experts, however, agreed the counter-signatures were forgeries.

Several of them hedged with the stipulation it might be difficult to prove them forgeries—especially if the defense should bring in its own staff of handwriting experts.

A special squad, meanwhile, began an investigation of each store where a check had been redeemed. Within eight hours the identity of the casher

was known to the police and he was placed under arrest.

"He's Thomas Robert Gaffer," Detective Jorgensen told Mr. Murphy that evening. "And he's our pigeon."

"You mean he killed Moxie?"

"Well now, I'm pretty sure he did." Detective Jorgensen was cautious. "Right now we're only holding him on suspicion. As soon as the boys get a little more evidence the District Attorney will move for an indictment. He likes to have all his facts neat and tidy when he goes before the grand jury."

"Oh," said Mr. Murphy. He mulled over a problem and finally asked, "Who's this Thomas Robert Gaffer?"

"Joe. I thought you knew."

"You mean Joe, the policy runner?"

Detective Jorgensen smiled. "Don't sound so surprised. Didn't I tell you I had a hunch about that joker."

"You mean you knew he was the killer all along?"

"No," admitted Detective Jorgensen. "Only, like I told you, I knew he wasn't telling a straight story."

"Did he confess?"

"No—but he will as soon as we really put the screws on."

"Yeah." Mr. Murphy said almost diffidently. "Anyway, didn't he say something?"

"Sure he did." Detective Jorgensen smiled again at his friend's obvious eagerness and then told him what had happened.

He recreated the scene with such vividness that Mr. Murphy felt as though he were actually witnessing the original event. The fact that in Mr. Murphy's imagination the stage was a dingy-grey room with bare walls, lighted by a fiery naked bulb in the ceiling—and its only occupants Thomas Robert Gaffer, alias Joe, and Detective Michael Jorgensen—heightened rather than detracted from an acute sense of reality which Detective Jorgensen's words painted for him.

Mr. Murphy listened as Joe spoke. "Who says I been cashin' any of them checks?"

"I do," answered Detective Jorgensen.

"So go ahead and prove it. You guys ain't got nothin' on me."

"No? What about the seven checks you didn't get around to cashing yet? What about Moxie's picture stuck inside the case cover? Or do you figure maybe a little bird planted them in your pocket?"

"Yeah. I mean, so maybe I *did* have them. Ain't nothin' wrong in that. Besides, you guys got no call keepin' me here. I wanna lawyer."

"Sure you do, Joe. Or should I call you Thomas?"

"Joe. I never did like that sissy mon—" He stared at the detective shrewdly. "Y'mean it's okay for me to call a lawyer?"

"Well, Joe, it's like this. Things like that take a little time. Tomorrow, maybe, when we get squared."

"Then I ain't sayin' another word."

"No?" Detective Jorgensen asked mildly. "Y'know, we got the right to hold you twenty-four hours on

suspicion. After which we can start shipping you around from precinct to precinct until it would take a G-man to find you. I've known of guys who got so fouled up nobody knew where they were for months and months."

"Yeah?" Joe licked his lips nervously. "Look, all you want to know is how come I got those checks?"

"That's right. Unless maybe you've got something else you want to get off your chest."

"Naw!" Joe twisted uncomfortably on the wooden chair. "I ain't got nothin' to be afraid of. You guys just got me pegged wrong." He lapsed into silence, staring pensively at the bleached disinfectant-scoured floor.

"The checks," Detective Jorgensen prodded. "You said you had some explanation."

"Yeah." Joe grinned triumphantly. "I bought 'em off Moxie. A square shake all around."

"You *bought* them?"

"Uh-huh. Moxie hadda have some cash in a hurry, so I gave him a couple hundred for the book of traveler's checks."

"What would he need cash for? All he had to do was spend those checks like they were ten-dollar bills."

"Maybe Moxie was in a spot where he didn't want people remembering him." Joe shrugged his shoulders. "That was his lookout. Besides, Moxie kinda missed the train when they was handin' out brains."

"So you gave him two hundred for six-hundred dollars' worth of checks. Big-hearted, weren't you?"

"Why not?" Joe asked in amazement. "A buck's a buck, ain't it? An' besides," he added complacently, "the guy was in a jam. I did him a favor an' that was worth something."

"Okay, we'll let that drop for a while. Now, what about this jam Moxie was in?"

"You got me."

"You didn't ask him?"

"Not me. I don't go pokin' my nose in another guy's business."

"I'll bet you don't!"

"Look, I ain't sayin' I'm a rose an' I ain't sayin' maybe I wouldn't pick up a soft touch if it come my way. But I never asked Moxie what was eatin' him an' he never told me."

"Okay. But what about where he was heading for? He must of mentioned something about that."

"Naw! Get this straight, will you? I didnt ask Moxie nothin' and he didn't tell me nothin'! I don't know where he went or when he went or how he went or why he went! All I know is I gave him two hundred for those checks!"

"Why didn't you tell me this that day I questioned you?"

"What?" Joe stared at the detective incredulously. "Since when is the city payin' me to do copper's work? Besides, I ain't the kinda guy goes 'round rattin' on a pal."

"I'll bet you aren't." Detective Jorgensen couldn't stem the sudden stream of sarcasm which welled

from his lips. "You're really such a virtuous character. You wouldn't rat on a pal, not you. Unless, of course, there was a buck in it. Like you said, a buck's a buck, ain't it?"

"Look," Joe sputtered, "what you pickin' on me for? You said all you wanted to know was how come I had those checks. I told you, didn't I?" So how about lettin' me go now."

"What's your hurry, Joe? Aren't we treating you nice?"

"Honest, I told you everything I know."

"Well now, there *is* one thing I'm still kinda curious about?"

"Yeah?" Joe eyed the detective suspiciously. "What's that?"

"Since when is your name William X. Harrison?"

"It ain't. I told you my legal handle is Thomas Robert Gaffer."

"So you did, so you did, Thomas —I mean Joe." Detective Jorgensen corrected himself hastily. "But if that's the case how come you signed those checks like your name was William X. Harrison?"

"I told you Moxie sold 'em to me, officer."

"Sure. But why didn't you have him sign each one in advance?"

"You know that wouldn'ta been any good. You gotta sign them things right in front of the guy who's gonna take 'em."

"Uh-uh. What about those stores you cashed them at? They endorsed the checks on the back."

"Yeah!" jeered Joe. "Them guys got businesses. How'd it look if I was to walk in a bank an' when they asked what kind of a joint I run, tell 'em it was a numbers route?"

Detective Jorgensen shook his head sadly. "I can see how it was, Joe. But you kinda stuck your neck out there."

"Look, so maybe it wasn't a hundred-percent legit, but I didn't steal nothing from nobody. I paid Moxie for them checks. Nobody got stuck for nothin', 'ceptin' maybe Moxie, an' like I said it was okay by him just so he got his mitts on some real green stuff in a hurry."

Detective Jorgensen spread his hands in agreement. "You don't have to convince me, Joe. I only hope a jury believes you."

"*Jury!*" Joe mouthed the word like it was a curse. "I told you I didn't do nothin'!"

"Well now, Joe, there's a couple ways a person could look at that. After all it's still against the law to commit forgery."

"Forgery?"

"That's what the D. A. will say. He's kinda funny about things like that."

"Oh!" There was a slight note of relief in Joe's voice. "Y'mean I'll probably get a deuce for sticking my pen in the wrong inkwell?"

"Maybe, Joe, maybe." Detective Jorgensen stared at him and added very softly, "Unless we decide to try you for Moxie's murder."

VI

Mr. Murphy was forced to spend the next forty-eight hours in a vacuum of suspense. When Detective Jorgensen came around two

evenings later he could barely contain himself until the detective sat down.

"Figured sure you'd be here last night, Mike."

"Sorry I couldn't make it. Took most of the night but we finally got the case wound up."

"Joe confessed?"

"Laid it right on the line, Murph. From now on it's up to the D. A.'s office."

Mr. Murphy settled back in his rocking-chair and sighed comfortably. And as he listened his imagination again set the scene with Detective Jorgensen and Joe as the only characters on stage.

This time Detective Jorgensen made the opening speech. "We got you cold, Joe. Whyn't you open up and then we can all get some sleep?"

"You ain't gonna frame me, copper!" Joe screamed. "I ain't holdin' still for no murder rap!"

"Nobody's trying to frame you, Joe."

"Naw! All you coppers is such sweet-lovin' angels!"

"I told you we got plenty of proof, Joe."

"Proof? In a pig's eye! This is what I get for tryin' to help somebody," Joe spat the words out bitterly. "First it gets me balled up in a forgery rap. And now you're tryin' to pin the big one on me. *Nuts!*"

Detective Jorgensen sighed. "Look, Joe, with your record, all the jury would have to hear is about those traveler's checks, and you'd be a cooked goose."

"Yeah! Then what're you needlin' me for now?"

"A confession will make it a lot easier for you, Joe. And you'll feel better too."

"I bet! You guys got nothin' but a lotta hot air and I ain't fallin' for none of that malarkey."

"You think so, Joe? Then how come we found your prints on Moxie's clothing?"

"Who says so?"

"I do." Which was not exactly the truth but Detective Jorgensen felt a little elasticity was permissible at this point. He hoped Joe wouldn't wonder why, if prints were found on Moxie's clothing, he hadn't been picked up long before, since his fingerprints were a matter of police record.

Joe, fortunately, did not see the flaw in the detective's statement. "So you found some of my prints. So what? Guess maybe I touched him when I give him the two hundred."

"His shoes too?" Detective Jorgensen elaborated the story a bit. "Maybe you tucked the dough in his socks for safekeeping, huh?"

"I ain't sayin' nothin' more."

"Okay, Joe, have it your way. Suppose we talk a little about your flat instead."

"What's my flat gotta do with this?"

"You been living in the same place for ten years, haven't you?"

"So what? Don't tell me that's against the law too."

"Just wondered why a single fellow like you didn't have a room in

some hotel." Detective Jorgensen winked solemnly. "You don't need a flat just for entertainin'."

"Nuts to you, copper! I don't like a hole in the wall. If I wanna have a flat it ain't no skin off your nose."

"Didn't say it was, Joe. Only I never figured a guy like you'd go in for housecleaning."

"Who said I did? Got a woman comes around a couple times a week and takes care of the joint."

"That's right." Detective Jorgensen snapped his fingers. "Almost forgot. Mrs. Donner, isn't it?"

"Who said anything about Mrs. Donner?" Joe was wary now. "The woman takes care of my place is Mrs. Franklin."

Detective Jorgensen shook his head. "You *sure?*"

"'Course I'm sure."

"I dunno," Detective Jorgensen said dubiously. "Mrs. Donner told us she worked for you."

"She used to. Mrs. Franklin takes care of the place now."

"You mean you fired Mrs. Donner?"

"That's right."

"Why?"

"Because I didn't like the way she was doing her work, that's why. Anyway I don't got to have a reason for tyin' the can to somebody."

"No. Only it does seem kinda funny Mrs. Donner worked for you six years if her work wasn't any good."

"She was okay at first, I guess. Only she got kinda sloppy after awhile so I told her to blow."

"Don't blame you. Guess there are some people who begin taking advantage after they've been on a job too long. Let's see, you fired her on July eighteenth, didn't you?"

"I don't remember."

"Well, Mrs. Donner does. She said you met her in the street and said you wouldn't be needing her any longer. Didn't even give a reason—just paid her what was coming."

"Okay, so I wasn't polite. That a crime too?"

"Just checking, Joe. You admit you fired Mrs. Donner July eighteenth?"

"I ain't admittin' nothin'. I tied the can to her, all right, but I don't remember exactly when."

"Have it your way. But you will admit that on August fifteenth you hired Mrs. Franklin to come around a couple of times a week and keep your flat straight?"

"Sure I hired Mrs. Franklin. But I don't remember when. I ain't got no head for dates."

"Seems funny you didn't hire anyone to replace Mrs. Donner for almost a month."

"I wasn't in no hurry. Look, copper, how long is this going to keep up? I'm gettin' tired."

"So am I, Joe. Anytime you want to talk . . ."

"Nuts! Just make like I didn't say nothin'."

"To get back to Mrs. Donner. She worked for you six years, didn't she?"

"I guess so."

"Don't guess!" Detective Jorgen-

sen snapped. "Either she did or she didn't."

"Okay! She worked for me about six years."

"*That's* better. Now, you'd say Mrs. Donner was fairly well acquainted with the flat, wouldn't you?"

"I guess so."

"We took her through your flat yesterday."

Joe's eyes narrowed. "What for?"

"Just sorta lookin' around. And y'know, we found some mighty interesting things."

"You guys got no right snoopin' around."

"We weren't snooping, Joe—just checking. Like your kitchen, Joe. Mrs. Donner says you bought two new knives since she left. A bread knife and a carving knife. She knew the knives you had."

"She's bats!"

"Uh-uh. We checked real carefully. For instance, you had Mrs. Donner buy a complete set of knives just a couple of months before she was fired. And we found the store where you bought two new knives on July twenty-third."

"So I bought some knives. Damn it, that's no crime!"

"Didn't say it was. Only we're sorta wonderin' what happened to the other knives. Mrs. Donner checked the set she bought you and two of them were missing."

"So maybe I threw 'em out with the garbage! Then I hadda go buy a couple new ones."

"*Two* knives? Kinda funny throwing two out at the same time."

"You guys are just twistin' everything around."

"Uh-uh. Y'know, we found a couple more things in your flat."

Joe licked his lips nervously.

"In the bathroom, Joe, we found some dried blood. Oh, you really cleaned that place but you never thought some of the blood would get in between the cracked tiles where you couldn't reach it."

"So I cut myself shaving."

"Some cut. Musta lost at least a couple quarts of blood. And hair too, huh?"

"Hair?" Joe echoed bewilderedly. "What're you tryin' to pin on me now?"

"We found some hairs in those cracked tiles, Joe. Now don't tell me you give yourself haircuts."

"So maybe I do."

"Uh-uh, Joe. We checked Moxie's place real good and found some hairs in a couple of his hats and on the collar of an old jacket. And they matched the ones we found in your bathroom."

Joe sat silently—there was no sound in the room save his deep labored breathing. And when the silence became unbearable Detective Jorgensen asked quietly, "Feel like talking now?"

Joe nodded his head.

"That's the spirit. Just tell us the way it happened."

"Well," Joe began after agreeing the statement he was about to make was of his own free will without any threats or coercion or promises of leniency. "Moxie comes around

this day and wants to sell me his list of customers.

"I know he's got some good names and I'm interested. He wanted three hundred and they was worth it but I whittled him down to two C-notes. So after we made the deal we went around to my place to get the dough.

"The stupe is doin' nothin' but yap how he's gonna hop a boat to Europe because he cleaned up on a number. He kinda got under my skin after awhile and I figured it was a hell of a note, him figurin' on spendin' all that dough on a bunch of foreigners. Anyway he gimme the list and after I checked the names I went in the bedroom to get the two hundred.

"When I came out he was sittin' at the table with his back to me, that flat head of his starin' at me like it was a ripe melon. I guess maybe thinkin' on how he figured to throw his dough away on a bunch of foreigners kinda rubbed me the wrong way. Anyway, before I knew what was happenin', I picked up a monkey wrench and conked him over the noggin.

"I guess maybe I hit him harder than I figured because when I bent down to see how he was he was dead."

"This monkey wrench," Detective Jorgensen asked. "Where was it?"

"In a toolbox in the bedroom closet."

"And you just picked it up accidentally?"

"That's right. Guess all his yappin' kinda got me dizzy an' I didn't realize what I was doing."

"Then what?"

"Well, there wasn't no use worryin' over what was done, so I went through his pockets. From the way the jerk was talkin' I figured he had a couple grand, at least. But six hundred ain't exactly hay. I was kinda peeved when I found out the stupe had traveler's checks but they ain't too tough to cash."

"That's all the money he had—just those checks?"

"Eight bucks in cash and some loose change."

"Then what happened, Joe?"

"Well, I knew I hadda get rid of him before Mrs. Donner come around. The way the weather was he'd start spoilin' in a hurry. I didn't want to just dump him either. I figured if you coppers never found no body you wouldn't have nothin' to worry about. But you guys get all the breaks."

"How come you picked on that empty lot?"

"Well, it just so happened that a couple nights before I took a short cut across that lot. I had a load on and the first thing I knew, I fell down a hole. Looked like some kids used to maybe play there and they had it covered over with loose boards and stuff. But from the looks of it they must've forgotten about it for a long time.

"Anyway I remembered it and I figured it'd be a good spot for Moxie. When it was good and dark I wrapped him up in some old canvas I had and dumped him in my car. I brought a shovel along and

it didn't take much diggin' to make the hole nice and deep. After I dumped Moxie in I filled it in and scattered a lot of stuff around.

"When I was fillin' the hole in, it started to rain, and I figured that was a real break because it would pack everything in solid. I was kinda leery somebody might see me but I got a break there. An' besides, it was late and real dark."

"What about the head, Joe? And Moxie's hand?"

"Yeah, the head . . . Well, I figured maybe somethin' might happen—you kin never tell. An' if they found a stiff with only one hand somebody might think of Moxie. An' I read some place about the way they can tell who a guy was from his teeth. I don't know if Moxie ever went to a dentist but there ain't any sense takin' a chance. So I pulled him into the bathroom. It was kinda messy—but I got the job done.

"I dropped them in a cement fill on that new part of the North Highway they was buildin'. Guess I shoulda carved him all up and dumped the whole mess in that fill."

"You killed Moxie on July seventeenth?"

"I guess so. Honest, copper, like I told you I ain't so hot on dates."

"Well, you fired Mrs. Donner on the eighteenth, so we figure it must have been the day before."

"Yeah. I didn't want her snoopin' around. It was a job cleanin' that mess in the bathroom and I figured she might tumble. So I tied the can to her and when things eased up I got Mrs. Franklin."

"And the knives and the wrench?"

"I dumped them in the river."

"All right, Joe. As soon as this is typed you'll sign it."

"Okay, copper. Hell, I don't know why you guys got the wind up. It ain't like Moxie was important or a big shot or nothin' like that. He was just a jerk who was gonna spend his dough on a long ferry-boat ride."

Thomas Robert Gaffer alias Joe, on the advice of defense counsel, who was engaged by the Ladies Auxiliary of the Society for the Protection of Unfortunate Criminals, pled guilty to the charge of second degree murder. The District Attorney had been dubious about agreeing to a lesser charge if the defendant pled guilty. But the boys in the back room reminded him that this wasn't an important case and what with elections coming up it might be a good idea to save the expense of a trial—not to mention votes controlled by the LASPUC.

"Y'know," Mr. Murphy remarked a couple of weeks after the sentencing of Joe, "it wasn't like I expected."

"It never is," Detective Jorgensen said.

"What I mean, in the movies and in stories . . ."

"Yeah, I know. But most are like this. Nothing smart. Sometimes they play in dumb luck and stay clear for a long time. Once in

awhile we never find out. Y'see, we got so much to check and not enough men. But mostly we keep pluggin' till we finger the right guy."

"But killing a man for six hundred dollars . . ."

"Lots of guys had their gullets slit for a nickle."

"Yeah. Anyway Joe'll spend a long time in jail."

"That he will. But maybe we ain't gettin' the last laugh. Joe's a cinch to cut himself into a numbers racket they got in the pen. If he stashes the dough away in an annuity he'll have more a month when he gets out than I'll get when I retire on pension."

Mr. Murphy sat in silent contemplation for a time and then his face brightened. "Y'know, Mike, I just had a hunch. I think I'm gonna play a buck on Moxie's winning number."

"Say—play one for me too, will you?"

Whenever Mr. Murphy reached the end of his tale he reflected what a noble punch line it would have been if the number had turned up a winner. But it hadn't. As a matter of fact Mr. Murphy was unfortunate enough to make his wager in the back of a grocery store just two minutes before the advent of a scheduled monthly raid. It was one of those things.

Only Detective Jorgensen's presence in the precinct house saved Mr. Murphy from the disgrace of spending the night behind bars.

For those true schizophrenics whose personalities are split between mystery stories and science fantasy, we here take time out to say the more or less proverbial few words about THE SAINT's companion, FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, in its current appearance.

All stories, of course, are new and chief among them are a pair of novels that have the Earth-Mars-Venus-Subspace set sitting up late at night. First of these is THE SANE MEN OF SATAN by FU's leading discovery, Jacques Jean Ferrat of NIGHTMARE TOWER fame. Here is a tale of time-travel that is not time-travel at all, of space-travel that passes most of its pages in no space at all, of lovers and enemies that cannot possibly meet yet become inextricably interwined.

Or, if you prefer Mars, you'll find yourself taking a whirl about that still-mysterious planet in veteran A. Bertram Chandler's mystically stirring and frightening THE FOREST OF KNIVES. Another provocative novel.

the magic of fear

by . . . Edgar Wallace

Out of the mysterious jungles of Africa steps a young witch-woman to confound a killer with magic.

ALL THIS HAPPENED in the interim between excellencies, or it could hardly have happened at all.

His Excellency, the retiring Administrator of the Reserved Territories, had departed amidst the banging of guns and the playing of the national anthem by a small band of near-white musicians, all of whom, and especially the cornet, had a tendency to play flat. The new Excellency was enduring the agony of gout at his house in Budleigh Salterton in Devon, and his departure from home was indefinitely postponed.

A change of administration made little or no difference to the people of the big river, and Captain Hamilton of the King's Houssas, for one, was hardly conscious of the lacuna as he strode savagely towards the hut which housed his youthful second in command.

His annoyance was well warranted, for Lieutenant Tibbetts had committed the unpardonable crime of writing to the newspapers—a weakness of his. Hamilton was moist and furious, for the afternoon sun blistered the world, and as he crossed the yellow oven-floor called a parade ground, the heat of it came

During the years between 1919 and his death in the early 1930's Edgar Wallace won an unique reputation for turning out English background mystery novels of uniform high quality in seemingly endless numbers. However, Wallace was a man of immensely varied background and capable of writing on a number of literary levels. Surely, his Sanders of the River stories, set in the steaming heat and color of tropical Nigeria, should never have been out of print. We are glad to bring one of them back.

through the soles of his boots and tortured him.

The barrack hutments which formed one side of the square danced and shimmered in the heat haze. He saw the fronds of the Isisi palms in a blur. Even the weaver birds were silent—when it grows too hot for the weavers to talk, it is very hot indeed.

Kicking open the door of Lieutenant Tibbetts' hut, he stepped in and snorted his disgust. Mr. Tibbetts, whose other name was Bones, lay face upward on the top of his bed—and he was arrayed in a costume beyond forgiveness, for not Solomon in all his glory wore purple pyjamas with alternate green and ochre stripes.

Hamilton flung down upon the table the paper he had been carrying as Bones opened one eye. "'Morning, sir," he said, slightly dazed. "Is it still raining?"

"'Morning!" snapped Hamilton. "It is within an hour of dinner and I've something to say to you, Bones!"

Bones relapsed into slumber.

"Wake up and hide your hideous feet!"

The eyelids of the sleeper fluttered. He murmured something about not seeing the point—he had at least seen the newspaper, and recognized the Gothic title-piece. He was merely being modest.

"The point is, Bones," said Hamilton, "nobody knows better than you that it is an offense for *any* officer to write to the newspapers on *any* subject! This"—he smacked the folded newspaper on the table—"this is an outrage! It verges on downright insubordination."

"Surrey Star and Middlesex Plain Dealer, sir," murmured Bones, his eyes closed, a picture of patience, forbearance and resignation, "with which, sir, is incorporated the *Sunbury Herald and Molesey Times,* dear old sir."

His long body was stretched luxuriously, his hands were clasped beneath his head, his large red feet overhung the end of the bed. He had the air and manner of one who was deeply wronged but forgave his enemies.

"It doesn't matter *what* paper you write to—"

"'To which you write,' dear old officer," murmured Bones. "Let us be jolly old grammarians, sir, an' superior. Don't let us go around debasin' the language—"

"Get up, you insubordinate devil, and stand on your big feet!" roared the captain of Houssas. But Lieutenant Tibbetts did not so much as open his eyes.

"Is this a friendly discussion, or isn't it, dear old sir?" he pleaded. "Is it a friendly call or a council of war, dear old Ham?"

Hamilton gripped him by the silk collar of his pyjama coat and jerked him to his feet.

"Assault!" said Bones quietly. "Mad with envy, captain strikes risin' an' brilliant young officer. Court martial finds jolly old captain guilty, and he takes poison!"

"A newspaper man you will never be," said Hamilton. Bones

bowed gravely. "You can't spell, for one thing!"

"Neither could dear old Napoleon," said Bones firmly, "nor dinky old Washington—spellin' is a sign of a weak mind. You're a good speller, I admit it, dear old Demosthenes—"

"The point is this—and I'm perfectly serious"—Hamilton pushed his junior on to the bed, and he collapsed obediently—"you really must not write political articles, suggesting that the Secretary of State should come and 'see with his own eyes' "—Hamilton sought for the offending paragraph and read it—"'. . . the work that is being carried out by young officers unknown, except by the indigenous natives, who adore them, and unhonored . . .'—of all the damned rubbish!"

Bones shrugged his narrow shoulders. His silence was offensively respectful.

"You'll not write any more of these self-advertising letters, Bones—either to the *Star,* the *Comet,* the *Moon,* the *Sun* or any other member of the solar system."

"Let us keep religion out of the discussion, dear old Ham," said Bones in a hushed voice. . . .

It is doubtful whether Mr. Nickerson Haben had even heard of the existence of that organ of public conscience, the *Surrey Star and Middlesex Plain Dealer.* He was not the type of man who gave a thought to any newspaper that had a circulation of less than half a million.

And yet, the appearance of this literary effort of Bones coincided with a peculiar moment of crisis in his life, and the sequel almost excused the subsequent jubiliation of the *Surrey Star* and went far to consolidate the editor's claim that "What the *Star* thinks today, the Government does tomorrow!"

For Nickerson Haben went almost at once to examine the Territories with his own eyes. He was in the middle thirties and had the globe at his feet. How this came to be the case nobody troubled to consider.

A narrow-chested and pallid man with heavy raven hair, one lock of which hung over his forehead in moments of oratorical excess, he was deep-eyed, thin-lipped, hollow-faced and had hands white and long. Nickerson was swept into the House of Commons in a whirlwind of oratory that blew down a phalanx of sober men and conservative citizens which stood between. Silver-tongued, or glib, according to your political prejudices, he carried his powers of suasion and criticism into the chaste and unemotional atmosphere of Parliament. So that ministers squirmed uneasily under the razor-edge of his gibes and the whips, forgathering in the lobby, grew pettish at the mention of his name. A party man, he never fell into the error of wounding the susceptibilities of his own leaders. If he criticized them at all, he merely repeated, in tones of finality, the half-confessions of fallacies they had already made.

When a Government fell Mr. Haben, deserting a safe seat, fought West Monrouth County, turned out the sitting member and returned to Westminster in triumph.

The new Government made him an under-secretary, first of Agriculture, then of Foreign Affairs. He had married the widow of Cornelius Beit, an American lady, fifteen years his senior—a clever woman with a violent temper and a complete knowledge of men. Their home life, though it was lived at Carlton House Terrace, was not happy.

She knew him rather too well—his own temper was none of the sweetest. He had all the arrogance of a self-made man who had completed the process just a little too young. She once told a near friend that Nickerson had a streak of commonness which she found it difficult to endure and there was even talk of a divorce.

That was just before her operation for appendicitis. The best surgeon in England performed—her recovery was never in doubt. Nickerson, under the spell of her recovery, went down to the House and delivered the best speech of his life on the subject of Baluchistan.

Three days later she was dead—there had occurred one of those curious relapses which are so inexplicable to the layman, so dreaded by the medical profession.

Haben was like a man stunned. Those who hated him—many—wondered what he would do now, with the principal source of income departed. They had time for no further than a brief speculation, the matter being decided when the will was read, leaving him everything—except for a legacy to a maid.

This tragedy occurred between excellencies, an opportunity seized upon by a sympathetic chief. Nickerson Haben went out on the first African mail-boat to combine business with recreation—to find flaws and forgetfulness.

Lieutenant Tibbetts, of the King's Houssas, was the newsman of headquarters. The lank legs of this thin monocled lad had brought many tidings of joy and calamity, mostly exaggerated.

Now he came flying across the lemon sands of the beach, a mail-bag in his hand, his helmet at the back of his head, surprising truth in his mouth.

He took the five steps of the stoep in one stride, dashed into the big cool dining-room where Hamilton sat at breakfast and dropped the bag into his superior's lap at the precise moment when Captain Hamilton's coffee-cup was delicately poised.

"Bones! You long-legged beach-hound!" cried Hamilton, fishing for his handkerchief to mop the hot Mocha from his white duck trousers.

"He's coming, Ham!" gasped Bones. "Saw my letter, dear old sir, packed his jolly old grip, took the first train!

Hamilton looked up sharply for

symptoms of sunstroke. "Who is coming, you left-handed oaf?" he asked, between wrath and curiosity.

"Haben, old sir. Under-Secretary, dear old Ham!" Bones was a little incoherent. "Saw my letter in the jolly old *Star*—he's at Administration now! This means a C.B. for me, Ham, old boy—but I'm not goin' to take anything unless they give old Ham the same."

Hamilton pointed sternly to a chair. "Sit down and finish your hysteria. Who has been stuffing you with this yarn?"

It was the second officer of the *Bassam,* he who had brought ashore the mails. Haben was already at Administrative Headquarters, having traveled on the same ship. For the moment Hamilton forgot his coffee-stained ducks.

"This is darned awkward," he said, troubled. "With Sanders upcountry. What is he like, this Haben man?"

Bones, for his own purpose, desired to give a flattering account of the visitor. He felt that a man who could respond so instantly to a newspaper invitation appearing over his name must have some good in him. He had asked the same question of the second officer and the second officer, with all a seaman's bluntness, had answered in two words, one of which was Rabelaisian and the other unprintable.

For Mr. Haben did not shine in the eyes of his social inferiors. Servants hated him—his private secretaries came and went monthly. A horsey member of the Upper House summed him up when he said that "Haben can't carry corn."

"Not so bad," said Bones mendaciously.

Early the next morning Sergeant Ahmet Mahmed brought a grey pigeon to Hamilton and the captain of Houssas wrote a message on a cigarette paper.

Haben, Foreign Office tourist, en route. He is at A.H.Q. raising hell. Think you had better come back and deal with him.

Hamilton had gone out in a surfboat to interview the captain and the character of Mr. Nickerson Haben was no longer a mystery to him.

He fastened the paper to the red leg of the pigeon and flung it up into the hot air. "'Ware hawks, little friend of soldiers," he said conventionally.

Linked very closely with the life and fate of Mr. Nickerson Haben, Under-Secretary of State, was that of Agasaka, the Chimbiri woman. Mr. Haben was dressed by the best tailor in Savile Row. Agasaka wore no clothes at all except for the kilt of dried grass which hung from her beautiful waist.

A tall maiden, very slim of body and very grave of eyes, no lover for any man, having a great love for something more imponderable than man. Terribly wise, too, in the ways of ghosts and devils. Straight-backed, small-breasted, beloved of children, so strong in the arm and

skilled in her strength that she could put a spear beyond the range of young men's throw—this was Agasaka, the Chimbiri woman, daughter of N'kema-n'kimi, the dead woodman.

She was elderly for a virgin, being seventeen. Had been wooed by men in their every mood. Had kindness for all, generosity for none.

Agasaka lived with her brother, M'suru, the hunting man—and his women hated her, for she never spoke a lie and was frank to her elderly brother on the matter of their numerous lovers. They would have beaten her but that they knew the strength of her throwing arm. Where hands did not dare tongues were more reckless but none of their mud stuck. Few men were so poor in mind that they would admit others had succeeded where they had failed.

She had lived for many years with her father in the deep of the forest in the abiding place of M'shimba M'shamba, the fearfully boisterous devil who tears up trees with each hand, whilst his mouth drips molten fire. And other mighty ones dwelt near by. N'guro, the headless dog, and Chikalaka-m'bofunga, the eater of moons—indeed, all except the Fire Lizard, whose eyes talk death.

And N'kema had taught her the mysteries of life and the beginning of life and the ground where life is sown. She knew men in their rawness and in their strength. N'kema taught her the way in which she might be more wonderful than any other woman—the magic handed down from mouth to mouth—the magic which was old when they laid the first deep stones of the Pyramids. . . .

Men were afraid of Agasaka—even Oboro, the witch-doctor, avoided her.

For this was her strangest magic—that she had the power to bring before the eyes of men and women that which they desired least to see.

Once a small chief stalked her by the river path where the grass is chin-high, having certain plans with her. At the right and lonely moment he slipped from cover, dropping his spears in the grass, and caught her by the arms so that, strong as she was, she could not move.

"Agasaka," he said, "I have a hut in this forest that has never heard a woman's voice."

He got so far and then over her silken shoulder he saw three black leopards walking flank by flank along the narrow path. Their heads hung low, their golden eyes shone hungrily.

In an instant he released her and fled to his spears.

When he turned again leopards and woman were gone.

Aliki, the huntsman of her village, neither feared nor cared, for he was familiar with magics of all kinds and often walked in the woods, communing with devils. One night he saw a vision in the fire, a great red lizard that blinked its heavy eyelids. Aliki looked round

his family circle in a cold-blooded search for a victim. Calichi, the fire-lizard, is the most benevolent of devils and will accept a deputy for the man or woman to whom, with its red and blinking eyes, it has given its warning of death.

Aliki saw his three wives and his father and an uncle who had come many days' journey on a hunting trip, and none of these, save the youngest wife, was well enough favored for the purpose. Calichi is a fastidious devil—nothing short of the best and the most beautiful will please him. Beyond the group sitting about the red fire and eating from the big pot that stood in the embers were other groups. The village street of Chimbiri-Isisi runs from the forest to the river, a broad avenue fringed with huts—and before each hut burnt a fire, and about each fire squatted the men and women of the house.

Dark had come. Above the tall gum trees the sky was encrusted with bright stars that winked and blinked as Calichi but more rapidly.

Aliki saw the stars, and rubbed his palms in the dust for luck—and at that moment into his vision came the second wife of his neighbor, a tall woman of eighteen, a nymph carved in mahogany, straight and supple of back, naked to the waistline of her grass skirt. Aliki knew that he had found a proper substitute and said her name under his breath as he caught the lizard's eyes. Thereupon the beast faded and died away and Aliki knew that the fire-god approved his choice.

Later that night when Loka, the wife of M'suru the huntsman, went down to the river to draw water for the first wife's needs, Aliki intercepted her.

"There is nobody so beautiful as you, Loka," he said, "for you have the legs of a lion and the throat of a young deer."

He enumerated other physical perfections and Loka laughed and listened. She had quarreled that day with the first wife of her husband and M'suru had beaten her. She was terribly receptive to flattery and ripe for such adventure as women enjoy.

"Have you no wives, Aliki?" she asked, pleased. "Now I will give you Agasaka, the sister of my husband, who is very beautiful and has never touched the shoulder of a man." This she said in spite, for she hated Agasaka and it is a way of women to praise, to strangers, the qualities of the sisters they loathe.

"As to Agasaka—and wives"—he made a gesture of contempt—"there is no such wife as you, not even in the hut of the old king beyond the mountains, which are the end of the world," said Aliki and Loka laughed again.

"Now I know that you are mad, as M'suru says. Also that you see strange sights which are not there to see," she said in her deep gurgling voice. "And not M'suru alone, but all men, say that you have the sickness *mongo*."

It was true that Aliki was sick and had shooting pains in his head. He saw other things than lizards.

"M'suru is an old man and a fool," he said. "I have a ju-ju who gives me eyes to see wonders. Come with me into the forest, Loka, and I will tell you magic and give you love such as an old man cannot give."

She put down her gourd, hiding it in a patch of elephant grass near the river's edge, and walked behind him into the forest. There, eventually, he killed her. He lit a fire and saw the lizard, who seemed satisfied. Aliki washed himself in the river and went back to his hut and to sleep.

When he awoke in the morning he was sorry he had killed Loka, for of all the women in the world she had been most beautiful in his eyes. The village was half empty, for Loka's gourd had been found and trackers had gone into the woods, searching for her.

They found her—but nobody had seen her walking to death. Some people thought she had been taken by Ochori fishermen, others favored a devil notorious for his amorous tricks. They brought the body back along the village street and all the married women made skirts of green leaves and stamped the Death Dance, singing strangely.

Aliki, squatting before his fire, watched the procession with incurious eyes. He was sorry he had killed the Thing that was carried shoulder high and, dropping his gaze to the dull fire, was even more sorry, for the hot lizard was leering up at him, his bulging eyelids winking at a great rate.

So he had taken the wrong sacrifice.

His eyes rose, rested on the slim figure of a woman, one hand gripping the door-post of her brother's hut. And there came to Aliki a tremendous conviction.

The lizard had vanished from the heart of the fire when he looked down. No time was to be lost. He rose and went towards the virgin of Chimbiri.

"I see you, Agasaka," he said. "Now this is a terrible shame to come to your brother's house, for men say that this woman Loka had a lover who killed her."

She turned her big eyes slowly towards him. They were brown and filled with a marvelous luminosity that seemed to quiver as she looked.

"Loka died because she was a fool," she said, "but he who killed her was a bigger. Her pain is past —his to come. Soon Sandi *malaka* will come, the brown butcher bird, and he will pick the eyes of the man who did this thing."

Aliki hated her but he was clever to nod his agreement.

"I am wise, Agasaka," he said. "I see wonders which no man sees. Now before Sandi comes with his soldiers I will show you a magic that will bring this wicked man to the door of your brother's hut when the moon is so and the river is so too."

Her grave eyes were on his. The sound of the singing women was a

drone at the far end of the village. A dog barked wheezily in the dark of the hut and all faces were turned towards the river, where the body was being laid in a canoe before it was ferried to the little middle island where the dead lie in their shallow graves.

"Let us go," she said and walked behind him through an uneven field of maize, gained the shelter of the wood behind the village and by awkward paths reached the outliers of the forest, where there was no maize, for this place was too sad for the weaver birds and too near to the habitation of man for the little monkeys who have white beards.

Still he walked on until they made a patch of yellow flowers growing in a clearing. Here the trees were very high and ten men might have stood on one another's heads against the smooth boles, and the topmost alone could have touched the lowermost branch.

Aliki stopped and turned. At that second came an uneasy stirring of the tree tops, a cold wind and the rumbling of thunder.

"Let us sit down," he said. "First I will talk to you of women who loved me and of how I would not walk before them because of my great thoughts for you. Then we will be lovers."

"There is no magic in that, Aliki," she said and he saw that she was against him and lifted his spear.

"You die as Loka died, because of the word which the lizard of fire brought to me," he said and his shoulder hunched back for the throw.

"I *am* Loka!" said the girl and he looked and his jaw dropped. For she was truly Loka, the woman he had killed. Loka with her sly eyes and long fingers. She had Loka's way of putting a red flower behind her ear and Loka's long satiny legs.

"Oh ko!" he said in distress and dropped his spear.

Agasaka bent in the middle and picked it up and in that moment became herself again. There was no flower and her fingers were shorter and where the sly smile had been was the gravity of death.

"This is my magic," she said. "Now walk before me, Aliki, killer of Loka, for I am not made for love but for strange power."

Without a word the bemused man walked back the way he had come and Agasaka followed and, following, felt the edge of the spear's broad blade. Though she touched lightly, there was a line of blood on her thumb where blade and skin had met. The wood was growing dark, the wind was alternately a shriek and a whimper of sound.

Near the pool at the edge of the forest she swung the spear backward over her left shoulder as a cavalry soldier would swing his sword and he half turned at the sound of the whistle it made . . .

The first wife of her brother was by the pool gathering manioc root from a place where it had been left

to soak—the head of Aliki fell at her feet as the first flash of lightning lit the gloom of the world.

The sun was four hours old when a river gunboat, a white and glittering thing, came round the bluff which is called The Fish because of its shape. The black waters of the river were piled up around its bows, a glassy hillock of water, tinged red at its edges, for the *Zaire* was driving against a six-knot current. Every river from the Isisi to the Mokalibi was in spate and there were sand shoals where deeps had been and deeps in the places where the crocodiles had slept open-mouthed the last time Mr. Commissioner Sanders had come that way.

Sanders stood by the steersman, a slim and dapper figure in spotless white, his pith helmet at a rakish angle, for an elephant fly had bitten him on the forehead the night before and the lump it had induced was painful to the touch. Between his regular white teeth was a long black cheroot. He had breakfasted and an orderly was clearing away the silver coffee-pot and the fruit-plates. Overhead the sky was a burning blue but the glass was falling with alarming rapidity and he desired the safe harborage of a deep bank and the shelter of high trees which a little bay south of Chimbiri would give to him.

"Lo'ba, ko'lo ka! A fathom of water by the mercy of God!"

The sleepy-eyed boy sitting in the bow of the boat drew up his wet sounding-rod.

Sanders' hand shot out to the handle of the telegraph and pulled and Yoka the engineer sent a clanging acknowledgment.

"Half a fathom."

Thump!

The boat slowed of itself, its wheel threshing astern, but the nose was in sand and a side-swinging current drove the stern round until it was broadside to the sand-reef. Then, as the wheel reversed, the *Zaire* began to move towards the right bank of the river, skirting the shoal until the nose found deep water again.

"Lord," said the steersman, virtuously annoyed, "this bank has come up from hell, for it has never been here since I was without clothing."

"Think only of the river, man," said Sanders, not inclined for gossip at the moment.

And now above the tree-tops ahead Sanders saw the rolling smoke of clouds—yellow clouds that tumbled and tossed and threw out tawny banners before the wind.

The still surface of the river was ripped into little white shreds that leapt and scattered in spray. Sanders moved his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, took it out, looked at it regretfully and threw it over the side. His servant was behind him with an oilskin invitingly held. He struggled into the coat, passed his helmet back and took in exchange the sou'wester, which he fastened under his chin. The heat was intolerable. The storm was driving a furnace blast

of hot air to herald its fury. He was wet to the skin, his clothes sticking to him.

A ribbon of blinding light leapt across the sky and split into a tracery of branches. The explosion of the thunder was deafening. It seemed as if a heavy weight was pressing down on his head. Again the flash, and again and again. Now it showed bluely on either bank, vivid blue shrieks of light that ran jaggedly from sky to earth. The yellow clouds had become black. —the darkness of night was on the world, a darkness intensified by the ghastly sideways light that came from a distant horizon where the clouds were broken.

"Port," said Sanders. "Now starboard again—now port!"

They had reached the shelter of the bank as the first rain fell. Sanders sent a dozen men overboard with the fore-and-aft hawser and made fast to the big gums that grew down to the riverside.

In a second the deck was running with water and the Commissioner's white shoes had turned first to dove-grey and then to slate. He sent for Yoka the engineer, who was also his headman.

"Put out another hawser and keep a full head of steam." He spoke in coast Arabic, which is a language allowing of nice distinctions.

"Lord, shall I sound the *oopa-oopa?*" he asked. "For I see that these thieving Akasava people are afraid to come out into the rain to welcome your lordship."

Sanders shook his head. "They will come in their time—the village is a mile away, and they would not hear your *oopa-oopa!*" he said and went to his cabin to recover his breath. A ninety-knot wind had been blowing into his teeth for ten minutes and ten minutes is a long time when you are trying to breathe.

The cabin had two long windows, one at each side. That to the left above the settee on which he dropped gave him a view of the forest path along which, sooner or later, a villager would come and inevitably carry a message to the village chief.

The lightning was still incessant—the rain came down in such volume that he might well think he had anchored beneath a small waterfall. But the light had changed and ahead the black of clouds had become a gray opacity.

Sanders pulled open the doors he had closed behind him. The wind was gusty but weaker. He reached out for a cheroot and lit it, patient to wait. The river was running eight knots—he would need hand-towing to the beach of the village. He hoped they had stacked wood for him. The Chimbiri folk were lazy, and the last time he had tied they showed him a wood stack—green logs, and few of them.

Yoka and his crew loved to hear the devil whoop of the *oopa-oopa*—Sanders knew just how much steam a siren wasted.

His eyes sought the riverside path—and at the critical moment. For he saw eight men walking two

and two and they carried on their shoulders a trussed figure that lay motionless as a corpse.

An electric chrysanthemum burst into blinding bloom as he leapt to the bank—its dazzling petals, twisting every way through the dark clouds, made light enough to see the burden very clearly, long before he reached the path to stand squarely in the way of eight sullen men and the riff-raff which had defied the storm to follow at a distance.

"O men," said Sanders softly—he showed his teeth when he talked that way—"who are you that you put the ghost mark on this woman's face?"

For the face of their passenger was daubed white with clay. None spoke—he saw their toes wriggling, all save those of one man, and him he addressed.

"M'suru, son of N'kema, what woman is this?"

M'suru cleared his throat.

"Lord, this woman is the daughter of my own mother. She killed Aliki, also she killed first my wife Loka."

"Who saw this?"

"Master, my first wife, who is a true woman to me since her lover was drowned, she saw the head of Aliki fall. Also she heard Agasaka say, 'Go, man, where I sent Loka, as you know best who saw me slay her.'"

Sanders was not impressed. "Let loose this woman that she may stand in my eyes," he said and they untied the girl and by his order wiped the joke of death from her dark young face.

"Tell me," said Sanders.

She spoke very simply and her story was good. Yet—

"Bring me the woman who heard her say these evil things."

The wife was found in the tail of the procession and came forward, important, frightened—for the cold eyes of Sanders were unnerving. But she was voluble when she had discovered her voice.

The man in the streaming oilskins listened, his head bent. Agasaka, the slim woman, stood grave, unconscious of shame—the grass girdle had gone and she was as her mother had first seen her. Presently the first wife came to the end of her story.

"Sandi, this is the truth and if I speak a lie may the 'long ones' take me to the bottom of the river and feed me to the snakes!"

Sanders, watching her, saw the brown skin go dull and gray; saw the mouth open in shocking fear.

What he did not see was the "long one"—the yellow crocodile that was creeping through the grass towards the perjurer, his little eyes gleaming, his wet mouth open to show the cruel white spikes of teeth.

Only the first wife of M'suru saw this and fell screaming and writhing at her husband's feet, clasping his knees.

Sanders said nothing but heard much that was in contradiction of the earlier story.

"Come with me, Agasaka, to my

fine ship," he said, for he knew that trouble might follow if the girl stayed with her people. Wars have started for less cause.

He took her to the *Zaire*. She followed meekly at his heels, though meekness was not in her.

That night came a tired pigeon from headquarters, and Sanders, reading the message, was neither pleased nor sorry.

High officials, especially the armchair men, worried him a little but those he had met were such charming and understanding gentlemen that he had lost some of his fear of them. What worried him more were the reports which reached him from reliable sources of Agasaka's strange powers.

He had seen many queer things on the river—the wonder of the *lokali* that hollowed the tree trunk by which messages might be relayed across a continent was still something of a puzzle to him. Magic inexplicable, sometimes revolting, was an everyday phenomenon in the jungle.

Some of it was crude hypnotism but there were higher things beyond his understanding. Many of these had come down through the ages from Egypt and beyond. Abraham had brought practices from the desert lands about Babylon which were religious rites among people who had no written language.

The *Zaire* was steaming for home the next day when he sent for Abiboo, his orderly. "Bring me this woman of Chimbiri," he said and they brought her from the little store-cabin where she was both guest and prisoner.

"They tell me this and that about you, Agasaka," he said, giving chapter and verse of his authority.

"Lord, it is true," said Agasaka when he had finished. "These things my father taught me, as his father taught him. For, lord, he was the son of M'kufusu, the son of Bonfongu-m'lini, the son of N'sambi . . ."

She recited thirty generations before he stopped her—roughly four hundred years. Even Sanders was staggered, though he had once met an old man of the N'gombi who told him intimate details about a man who had lived in the days of Saladin.

"Show me your magic, woman," he said and to his surprise she shook her head.

"Lord, this one magic only comes when I am afraid."

Sanders dropped his hand to his Browning and half drew it from its leather holster.

He was sitting under an awning spread over the bridge. The steersman was at the wheel, in the bow the *kano* boy with his long sounding rod. Purposely he did not look at the woman, fixing his eyes on the steersman's back.

His hand had scarcely closed on the brown grip when, almost at his feet, he saw the one thing in all the world that he loathed—an English puff adder, mottled and swollen, its head thrown back to strike.

Twice his pistol barked—the steersman skipped to cover with a

yell and left the *Zaire* yawing in the strong current.

There was nothing—nothing but two little holes in the deck, so close together that they overlapped. Sanders sprang to the wheel and straightened the boat and then, when the steersman had been called back and the sounding boy retrived from the cover of the woodpile where he crouched and trembled, Sanders returned to his chair, waving away Abiboo, who had arrived, rifle in hand, to the rescue of his master.

"Woman," said Sanders quietly, "you may go back to your little house."

Agasaka went without the evidence of triumph a lesser woman might have felt. He had not looked at her—there was no mesmerism here.

Sanders stooped down and examined the bullet holes, too troubled to feel foolish.

That afternoon he sent for her again and gave her chocolate to eat, talking of her father. She was sitting on the deck at his feet and once, when he thought he had gained her confidence, he dropped his hand lightly on her head as he had dropped his hand on so many young heads.

The puff adder was there—within striking distance, his spade head thrown back, his coils rigid.

Sanders stared at the thing and did not move his hand and then through the shining body he saw the deck planks and the soft bitumen where plank joined plank, and then the viper vanished.

"You do not fear?" he asked.

"Lord . . . a little. But now I do not fear, for I know that you would not hurt women."

The *Zaire,* with its strange passenger, came alongside the residency wharf two hours before sundown on the third day. Captain Hamilton was waiting, a fuming, angry man, for he had been the unwilling host of one who lacked something in manners.

"He's pure swine," said Hamilton. "Nothing is good enough for him; he raised hell when he found you weren't here to meet him. Bones mollified him a little. The silly ass had a guard of honor drawn up on the beach. I only found this out just before the boat landed and it was too late to send the men to quarters. But apparently it was the right thing to do. Nickerson Esquire expected it—and more. Flags and things and a red carpet for his hooves and a band to play 'Here comes the bride!' "

All this between wharf and residency garden. A figure in white stretched languidly in a deep chair turned his head but did not trouble to rise. Still less was he inclined to exchange the cool of the broad veranda for the furnace of space open to a red-hot sun.

Sanders saw a white face that looked oddly dirty in contrast with the spotless purity of a duck jacket. Two deep suspicious eyes, a long untidy wisp of hair lying lankly on a high forehead—a pink almost bloodless mouth.

"You're Sanders?" Mr. Haben looked up at the trim figure.

"I am the Commissioner, sir," said Sanders.

"Why weren't you here to meet me—you knew that I was due?"

Sanders was more shocked than nettled by the tone. A coarse word in the mouth of a woman would have produced the same effect. Secretaries and under-secretaries of state were god-like people who employed a macrology of their own, wrapping their reproofs in the silver tissue of stilted diction which dulled the sting of their rebukes.

"Do you hear me, sir?" The man on the chair sat up impatiently. Hamilton, standing by, was near to kicking him off the stoep.

"I heard you. I was on a visit to the Chimbiri country. No notice of your arrival or your pending arrival was received."

Sanders spoke very carefully. He was staring down at the scowling Nickerson Haben.

Mr. Haben had it on the tip of his tongue to give him the lie. There was, as the late Mrs. Haben had said, a streak of commonness in him. But there was a broader streak of discretion. The gun still hung at the Commissioner's hip—the grip was shiny with use.

"H'm!" said Mr. Under-Secretary Haben and allowed himself to relax in his chair.

He was clever enough, Sanders found—knew the inside story of the territories—was keen for information. He thought the country was not well run. The system was wrong, the taxes fell short of the highest possible index. In all ways his attitude was antagonistic. Commissioners were lazy people, intent on having a good time and "their shooting." Sanders, who had never shot a wild beast in his life, save for the pot or to rid himself of a pressing danger, said nothing.

"A thoroughly nasty fellow," said Hamilton.

But it was Bones who suffered the heaviest casualty to his amour-propre.

Left alone with the visitor in the hour before dinner Bones cunningly led the conversation toward the *Surrey Star and Middlesex Plain Dealer.* "I suppose, sir, when you read my jolly old letter, you thought I had a fearful nerve?"

"Your letter?" Mr. Haben allowed his head to fall in Bones's direction.

". . . about seeing the place with your own holy old eyes," and Bones went on, unconscious of the doom which awaited him, and explained fully his reason for writing, the thought that led him to write, the incident that induced the thought.

"My good young man, you don't imagine that His Majesty's Government would send a Minister of State flying off to Africa because an empty-headed subaltern wrote letters to an obscure county journal, do you?"

Bones opened and closed his eyes very quickly.

"I came—but why should I tell you?" asked Nickerson Haben wearily. "You may be assured that your letter had nothing to do with

my coming. As I said before you officers have too much time on your hands. It is a matter which requires looking into."

But it was at dinner that he touched the zenith of his boorishness. The dinner was bad. He hated palm-nut chop—sweet potatoes made him ill—the chicken was tough, the coffee vile. Happily he had brought his own cigars.

Bones spent that trying hour wondering what would happen to him if he leant across the table and batted an Under-Secretary with a cut-glass salt-cellar.

Only Sanders showed no sign of annoyance. Not a muscle of his face moved when Mr. Nickerson Haben made the most unforgivable of all suggestions. He did this out of sheer ignorance and because of that streak of commonness which was his very own.

"A native woman is a native woman," said Sanders quietly. "Happily, I have only had gentlemen under my control and that complication has never arisen."

Mr. Haben smiled sceptically—he was sourest when he smiled.

"Very noble," he said dryly, "and yet one has heard of such things happening."

Hamilton was white with rage. Bones stared open-mouthed, like a boy who only dimly understood. The pale man asked a question and to the amazement of the others Sanders nodded.

"Yes, I brought a girl down from Chimbiri," he said. "She is at present in the Houssa lines with the wife of Sergeant Abiboo. I hardly know what to do with her."

"I suppose not," more dryly yet. "A prisoner, I presume?"

"N-no"—Sanders hesitated, seemed confused in Haben's eyes. "She has a peculiar brand of magic which rather confounds me."

Here Mr. Nickerson Haben laughed. "That stuff!" he said contemptuously. "Let me see your magician."

Bones was sent to fetch her—he swore loudly all the way across the dark square.

"That is what we complain about," said Mr. Haben in the time of waiting. "You fellows are in the country so long that you get niggerised." Sanders winced. "Nigger" is a word you do not use in Africa. "You absorb their philosophies and superstitions. Magic—good God!"

He waggled his long head hopelessly. "My poor wife believed in the same rubbish—she came from one of the southern states—had a black mammy who did wonderful things with chicken bones!"

Sanders had not credited him with a wife. When he learnt that the poor lady had died he felt that worse things could happen to a woman.

"Appendicitis—an operation . . . fool of a doctor." Mr. Haben unbent so far as to scatter these personal items. "As I said before, you people—hum . . ."

Agasaka stood in the doorway, "missionary dressed" as they say. Her figure was concealed in a blue

cotton cloth wrapped and pinned about her to the height of her breast.

"This is the lady, eh? Come here!" He beckoned her and she came to him. "Let us see her magic. Speak to her!"

Sanders nodded. "This man wishes to see your magic, Agasaka. He is a great chief amongst my people."

She did not answer.

"Not bad-looking," said Nickerson and did a thing which amazed these men, for he rose and, putting his hand under her chin, raised her face to his. And there was something in his queer, hard eyes that she read as we may read the printed word. The streak of commonness was abominably broad and raw-edged.

"You're not so bad for a nig—"

He dropped his hands suddenly. They saw his face pucker hideously. He was looking at a woman, a handsome woman with deep shadows under her eyes. It was the face he often saw and always tried to forget. A dead white face. She wore a silk nightdress, rather high to the throat.

And she spoke. "Won't you wait until the nurse comes back, Nick? I don't think I ought to drink ice-water—the doctor says—"

"Damn the doctor!" said Nickerson Haben between his teeth and the three men heard him, saw his hand go up holding an imaginary glass, saw his eyes fall to the level of an imaginary pillow.

"I'm sick of you—sick of you! Make a new will, eh? Like hell!"

He stared and stared, and then slowly turned his drawn face to Sanders. "My wife"—he pointed to space and mumbled the words—"I—I killed her—"

And then he realized that he was Nickerson Haben, Under-Secretary of State, and these were three very unimportant officials—and a black woman who was regarding him gravely. But this discovery of his was just the flash of a second too late.

"Go to your room, sir," said Sanders and spent the greater part of the night composing a letter to the Foreign Secretary.

a wreath from the sky

by . . . Rufus King

If infinite capacity for taking pains is the hallmark of genius, Farwell was a genius at murder.

HE HAD A most extraordinary smile which spread his lips very wide over white teeth and killed the lowering sullen look that habitually held his face. Mrs. Warburton married him because of it—or rather he had married Mrs. Warburton in the gray shingled rectory of the church at Westhampton Beach on Long Island. It was an act which had cleared the decks for the last detail. All that he now had to do was to kill her.

Mr. Austin, the young minister with the Oxford-scholarship look in his baffled eyes, had wished them happiness, pocketed ten dollars, taken a glum look at the gray dawn and got back into bed with his wife, who thought the whole business pretty queer. What she meant, she pointed out, hitching up on an elbow to be sure that his eyes stayed open, was that love was all right and Godly but that there ought to be a limit to its eccentricities.

"Such as what?" he had asked her wearily.

"Getting married at four in the morning for one thing, Wilton."

"They want to catch the tide for crossing the bar. They're taking the outside course."

"But even so, Wilton, they could

The name Rufus King is almost as widely and honorably known to modern mystery story readers as, a century and a half ago, it was known in statesmanly circles. Mr. King's most famous character is, of course, Lieutenant Valcour, that sterling pillar of the New York Homicide Bureau. However, Valcour cannot be on hand for all of Mr. King's fictional crimes—and in this case fate proves an able substitute.

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just as well have been married last night. I mean they had the license and everything." Mrs. Austin knew definitely that there was an end to the number of times when their maid, Luenda, could be rooted out of bed to act as a witness. Bitter experience had taught her that even the romantic had a habit of palling on the Lithuanian brain when it coveted sleep. "And that isn't all," she added.

"What isn't?"

"Oh, well—you *know,* Wilton."

He did, of course, but he wouldn't admit it. The Roberts-Warburton marriage *had* been queer, not patently so but darkly beneath its surface. Nobody really knew Mrs. Warburton—now Mrs. Farwell Roberts—beyond the mechanics of her having rented one of the Heminsford cottages on the beach at eight thousand dollars for the year.

She drove an expensive car—her age was variously estimated through a range including the late twenties and all the thirties—she had been widowed for several years and had never talked about her husband. There had been, however, an odd expression on her face when Mr. Warburton's name was mentioned. Mr. Austin had caught it twice during chats with her after Sunday services. It had made her look like a child remembering some unpleasant experience that had frightened her very much. Unquestionably she had that vague thing known as a past in reputable society.

"Money makes people live impulsively," he said.

"Don't beat about the bush, Wilton."

"I'm not. You can't put your finger on any special detail. You've got to fall back on generalities."

But his wife didn't. She shoved up her hair, which was neither bobbed nor long, and said, "No one ever saw them together."

The dawn was a shade lighter. It was true, he thought, no one ever *had* seen them together—that is, not together in the sense his wife implied it, the way he and she had been together, for example, during their courting. "Funny she'd stay here all winter anyway," he said.

"Oh, but Wilton, everybody's already said *that.* She's rich, really rich."

"Maybe it's just a front."

"No—Jasper says so." Jasper Cooley, Mrs. Austin's brother, was a local attorney.

"How does *he* know?"

"Why, when he drew up her new will, of course."

"Will?"

"Yes. She left everything to Farwell Roberts. Thirty thousand a year, Wilton, even as times are now. Jasper did think it most strange."

They looked at each other in the foggy gray light. Both had read their Bolitho and the pattern of the notorious mass murders in the past was suddenly plain. They skirted the remembrance that two years ago, when Farwell had married the Jones woman, there had also been

a honeymoon on a boat, which had caught fire and sunk before a nearby Coast Guard cutter could reach it, and that in spite of the most heroic efforts on Farwell's part—witnessed by the Coast Guard—his wife had drowned and her body never recovered.

"But we've always known Farwell," he said.

She took a long time in answering. "Well, lots of people knew Mr. Crippen," she said ominously.

The *Blue Star* was one of the stanchest craft moored in the yacht basin. A trunk-cabin cruiser built eleven years ago, Farwell had bought her, in her middle age, with his last three thousand dollars. Forty feet in length with a nine-foot beam, powered by a hundred-and-fifteen-horsepower Sterling, she could, when throttled down, stand the pounding of fairly heavy seas.

A small forecastle in her bows had bunks for two, then came a glassed-in bridge on the overhead of which was lashed, on chocks, her tender. Her cabin had two bunks, a diminutive galley, while eighteen-inch railed decks on either side of it led to the cockpit aft. A locker in the stern held ice, the perishable food supplies and a compartment for fish. Set in the forward starboard corner of the cockpit was a box containing two tanks of compressed illuminating gas for the cooking stove in the galley. She was most compact.

There were two arrangements Farwell had made that, to go in for understatement, were contrary to the practices of good seamanship. He had removed the contents of the fire extinguishers and filled them with water. He had bored holes in the cork blocks of one of the lifebelts and had refilled them with lead, sewing the canvas back in place with painstaking neatness. He kept this belt in the cabin. The other belts were in the tender, secured beneath its canvas cover, the lashings of which would have taken a good ten minutes to loosen unless they were slashed with a knife.

The day was a dull oyster-mist by half-past five, with the water of the yacht basin and its winding channel cut from the sky by flat meadows of sage green and the spiritless outline of a herd of cows.

Edna fingered a plain gold ring and thought, *I shall never tell him. He must never know.* He looked a good deal like a god to her, of the breed that had absorbed her so as a child in Greek mythology, one that was a little tired, for his strong shoulders seemed always bent from bowing too long, she thought, beneath some shackling yoke.

The engine whined as he pressed the starter, caught, broke into a muffled roar and flat water throbbed. She loosened the bowline—as he had taught her to—then the spring line and the stern, jumping into the cockpit and holding her off until they were clear.

He thought, *I'll get it over with quickly, after we drop Montauk and*

set for Block Island. We'll fish first, close to the other boats, where they'll see us.

She went through the cabin and up a short companionway onto the bridge and stood near him, not touching him, for she felt he would resent any contact while busied with navigating the boat. It was enough, however, to be with him, accepted by him as a comrade in this ever, to her, hazardous business of putting out in a small boat to the sea.

All winter he had done it except in the severest storms, battling with his sinews the crushing weight of breakers. He had gone alone, far out for cold wet hours, a splendid pygmy against the callous reaches of an ocean, to get a few fish, a few dollars, and with that sort of dollars he'd bought this boat for her. Her heart was full of a feeling that came close to adoration.

He flooded her with his smile and said, "Take her a minute, will you? Hold straight for the center of that bridge."

They had cleared the yacht-basin channel and were going toward West Bay bridge. The bridge-tender wouldn't be on duty until seven so Edna held the course while Farwell lowered the mast back flat and they roared beneath the draw and into Moriches Bay. He raised the mast again and took a thoughtful look at the weather with eyes that were dark enough to be black beneath heavy lashes penciling their upper lids.

A slight haze, a falling barometer and no wind pleased him. He took the wheel and set a westerly course with Fire Island on their left for New Inlet, his fingers keeping up their sure and constant play upon the wheel, with all of his gestures close to his body.

He thought, *I'll get enough of the money in a month to shut Johnson up. Then I'll take him fishing.*

They reached the inlet and a thrill went through her as they carefully nosed their way in wide divergent swings along its channel, which never stayed put but shifted after the vagary of every strong blow, a treacherous channel shallowly cupping a swift-boiling tide.

He told her in that grave voice of his where, at half-tide, you could see the stern-post of the wreck of the *Great Eastern,* with its stem a foot down beneath the water a hundred and thirty feet beyond. They kept it on their starboard side while hanging in the flat swift rush of waters, waiting for the opportune moment for taking the lunge through the narrow opening in the outer bar.

She could almost feel the *Blue Star* gathering beneath her, then the roar and forward leap, head-on for the pencil of lighter color where white water thundered least. Her breath was shot back into her as they took the first-line bumps, then heeled to port and out diagonally, always out, with the angry white farther behind them. The boat loped easily along a course which

Farwell gravely explained to her was east-northeast by one-half northeast.

"Darling," Edna said, "I not only wouldn't know, but I wouldn't care. Would a good honest cocktail mean anything to you right now? I'm going to shake one up. This happens to be the happiest moment of my life."

They trolled southeast of Montauk Light. A moderate-to-strong southwest wind had sprung up and only three other boats were out. She stood in the cockpit, holding a short stout rod and using about a hundred feet of line with a wire leader and a feathered lure baited with a strip of squid.

It was the time of day and the season of the year when pollack, a fish who lie deep, come to the surface to snap at whitebait, leaving them dead for clouds of gulls to dive screaming and lift the broken carcasses in an ever-futile effort to swallow them whole.

Something in her life was, Edna thought, being always given some overlarge chunk that couldn't be eaten. Like Hale Warburton, who had married her after a tragically stupid experience with a minor gangster and had then watched her during six vitiating years with the sleepy eyes of a neurotic jailer and had been killed in a crash while tailing her town car in a taxi during a shopping expedition for a blouse.

The rod lurched and the handle of the reel jerked free and spun beneath her thumb. She checked it and yelled forward, "I've got one!"

Farwell threw the clutch into neutral and joined her as she pressed the butt of the rod against her stomach and started reeling in.

"Don't let him have any slack," he said.

"I won't."

Her wrist began to hurt her painfully with every yard of line reeled in against a stubborn and inert resisting lump. The pollack broke no water but fought with a deadly inertia each inch of the way. It made one lunge and she gave it line, then checked it, straining every muscle of her body, feeling Farwell's eyes on her and determined, even if it killed her, to bring the fish within reach of his gaff.

Edna started reeling, her right wrist hurting like fire, slowly, jerkily and ineptly, and the sodden tonnage kept yielding while the angle of the taut line grew more acute.

"Don't let him get under the boat."

"I'll be with him if he does, darling."

The pollack shot dead down to its native depths and with all of her remaining strength she couldn't budge it. The rod's tip sank lower to the water but she gave no slack and Farwell said, "Want me to take it?"

"No."

She raised without reeling, then held the gain by lowering the rod and reeling in as she did so. The cords of her wrist swelled and grew tighter and Farwell was close beside

her, leaning over the gunwale with the gaff and carefully watching the men on the other boats, who were looking at Edna and him. He was stamping on his memory the faces of the men who were nearest and would testify, if it became necessary, that he and Edna had spent the late afternoon harmoniously fishing.

The last lift did it and the gaff sank down, an upward jab and twenty pounds of slick shining fish flapped viciously on the deck. She felt a terrifying moment of exultation and couldn't take her eyes from the pollack with its sleek length and its dark-gray back separated from its white belly by a thin silver stripe. She held the hard muscle of Farwell's arm to keep from slipping with the lurch of the boat.

"Had enough?"

"Plenty, darling. But how about you?"

"Your party this time, Edna."

"Then let's go."

Farwell slit with a short broad kitchen knife and tore out entrails, then threw the fish in the metal compartment of the locker in the stern. He took a mop and cleaned the deck. All this would be seen by the other boats too. He had learned to his sorrow the urgency of precise detail in murder. Johnson had taught him that.

They set a course east to one-half east-northeast from a point southeast of Montauk Light, allowing six points for the tide rip, which was running flood, that crested vicious meeting of Sound and ocean off the island's end. She stood beside him, staring ahead at the haze-rimmed platter of the Atlantic, unbroken by any sight of land, while the deck would drop suddenly from beneath her feet, then push her rapidly up again as the boat pounded with shuddering thumps on the race's uneven seas.

Farwell revved the motor down to eight hundred and looked with his dark-lashed eyes for the Coast Guard cutter which had been cruising the neighborhood waters for the past few weeks. The cutter was nowhere in sight and the fishing had kept them later than he had planned. It would be dark within an hour and he definitely needed for his purpose a certain amount of light.

He began to whistle, "When Your Hair Has Turned to Silver." It was his only tune and the sound came softly through his teeth between parted lips. He thought, *I made a damn fool of myself last time by being impatient and rushing things. This time I won't. We'll loaf back tomorrow and catch the cutter sometime during the afternoon.*

He looked sideways at Edna appraisingly and decided that the night might not be completely wasted at that. Funny sort of a face she had. It looked as though it could be a whole lot younger than she let it be. He started whistling again and concentrated on Johnson.

The channel light of Northwest Harbor was a fixed gleam against the treeless low-lying hills of Block Island. Shortly they were nosing between channel buoys, sheltered by

a breakwater, for the long outjutting ferry dock.

Edna stood on the overhead of the bridge and jumped with a bowline onto the wharf, then moored the *Blue Star* about fifty feet astern of the *Agnes May,* a fishing schooner out of New Bedford. She felt dead tired but completely happy, moored in safe harbor with boiled lobsters—he had promised her that—and the night before them, sheltered, lulled by the tide run through the dock's tall piling.

They mixed some cocktails, washed and dressed, he putting on flannels and a clean shirt and she white linen with a sweater, for the night was cold. The gin and vermouth warmed both of them. By the time he'd had his fourth he was moodily resigned at the Coast Guard cutter not having been where it should have been and he damned Johnson succinctly beneath his breath for being the blackmailing rat that he was.

He locked the cabin and they walked the length of the dock, facing the bleak gauntness of the treeless hills with the scatter of ugly, serviceable houses spotting their shorn crests. They bought lobsters netted from a car tied to a jetty cluttered with beam trawlers, getting six young ones and paying twenty cents a pound for them.

Farwell carried them squirming in a gunny sack, taking Edna up to a small restaurant and bar about a stone's throw from the wharf along a deserted street darkened by the night, its bleakness stabbed by occasional houses that looked like broken teeth.

Inside, the crew of the *Agnes May* was already installed, three being lined up on stools at the bar, a couple seated at a table and one blond youngster standing entranced beside a phonograph which was complainingly shrieking out something about orchids in the moonlight. They wore sword-fishermen's hats with absurdly long peaks.

They were ribbing the bartender, a saturnine-faced youngster who was the brother of the proprietress and who celebrated the reaching of the limit of his liquid capacity by falling with a crash, flat on his face behind the bar. Some one set him up again and Edna sat down at a table while Farwell went into the kitchen and arranged that the lobsters be boiled and a panful of potatoes French-fried.

The seamen seemed awfully young to her—and they were—and friendly, with broad Boston accents and soft voices. The blond-haired youth at the phonograph left it and brought her over a glass of beer, sitting down and telling her that they had caught two swordfish and were going to change over to dragging for fluke. He asked her if she would dance.

She danced while a hearty ribald song sprang up from the two at the table—unlike any song she had ever heard. Not a chantey, nothing hill-billy, no interminable saga from the Western plains but good honest Rabelaisian bawdiness, delivered

with assurance and vim. The proprietress came in, in dark-blue sateen, and stopped them and they were quiet for about three minutes until they had thought up another song and started singing again.

Edna drank two more Martinis with Farwell and the bulk of the crew of the *Agnes May*—then lobster, a glutting of lobster and hot French-frieds. The table was a shambles of red shells and claws. At last Edna and Farwell left and started back along the grim silent street to the dock, where the tide still hissed about the pilings like ripping silk.

When they were inclosed in the small neat cabin with its effect of infinite intimacy, peace and warmth, Edna said, "I love you, darling. I love you very much."

All through the night in the impressionable darkness, while she lay there hot and close and sleeping beside him, with the gentle restlessness of the boat and the constant slap of waters, he tried to think methodically and in simple terms. It was an age-old pattern, a commonplace in extortion.

Johnson, a degenerate drunkard of one of the town's good families, Johnson with his small camera catching a picture of him boring the holes in the life-belt, another of him filling the holes with lead—the life-belt with which he had killed his first wife—then hiding the negatives and demanding the payment of an excessive amount.

His mind went beyond this coming business about Edna and tried to conceive some variant to the current plot for killing which alone he believed to be foolproof.

Johnson was smart. He'd never, with his knowledge, go out alone with him in a boat. Hunting, perhaps? While hunting—Edna stirred, and her hand slipped confidingly beneath his rigid arm. The contact meant nothing to him. His mental images had been so strong that he thought of her as already dead.

The *Agnes May,* its crew having spent a peaceful night in jail for breaking windows, was gone by the time they cast off. A strong west wind had come up during the night and the man who brought them ice warned them that the sea beyond the breakwater was bad. He suggested they lay over but Farwell said it might turn into a three-day blow and they wanted to shove off and get back to Montauk for the night.

They took on fifty gallons of fresh water and forty gallons of gasoline at another dock. It was sheer waste as the gasoline would never be used but the detail seemed to him excessively clever, for the man could testify that the tanks had been filled—a gesture which people would feel he would never have made had the destruction of the boat been planned.

They cleared the breakwater and he set a course southwest by one-half south-southwest, throttling the techometer down to eight hundred revolutions. Crests sheeted the forward windows of the bridge, leaking through, and buckets of brilliants hurtled past their portside.

Edna's lips grew paler as the *Blue Star* mounted a heavy sea to crack down with a dead-weight shudder on the next. She frankly thought of disaster, not believing for a minute that the boat would stand much more punishment. But it did so for an interminable hour when Block Island was lost behind them and Montauk became a vague cloud-bank low in front.

Directly off the starboard beam he spotted it, a grayish blob belching a whipped feather of black smoke, heading toward them, about two miles away. Edna did not see his hand move, did not see the engine stopped. They had reached the race and the impact of the meeting tides was a mad boiling of thwarted forces around them, lurching the boat, shaking it, heeling it over sickeningly.

Edna said stupidly, "Why, we've stopped."

"Nothing to worry about. Hold this up, will you?"

He raised one side of the hatch covering the engine and she braced herself and held it as he swung down and crouched beneath the deck. He stayed there for about a minute and she thought, as he dropped the cover down again, that she smelled a very strong odor of gasoline.

"Everything under control, darling?" she asked him, trying to keep anxiety from her voice.

Farwell mumbled something about a copper feed line while his eyes leveled speculatively on the cutter still swiftly heading their way.

"If we should drift like this, where would we end up, darling?"

"France, I guess."

"No—seriously?"

He shrugged. "I guess the fresh water would last about a week."

"And then?"

His voice seemed deliberately hard. "Stop worrying."

"I'm not, darling. I'm curious."

"That Coast Guard boat is heading for us now."

"They'll tow us in?"

He looked at her oddly. "Yes, sure."

A lurch shot her into his arms and she clung there, laughing nervously, her cold face jammed against his wet shirt. "How's for a shot of Peter Dawson?" she said.

He helped her down the companionway and made her sit on one of the bunks. "You're liable to break a leg moving about."

"Well, we all know the answer to that one, darling."

Edna pressed back against cushions and gripped the edge of the bunk to keep from being tossed out. It was several minutes before he came back down the after companionway, carrying some ice. The small doorway of the galley turned him into a giant as he braced his legs and chopped the ice, dropping it into two glasses, then pouring whiskey and splashing in charged water. He stumbled and just escaped cracking his head against the low ceiling as he caught himself and straightened up. He sat beside her.

"Shouldn't we be on deck?" she

said. "Don't you tie a towel or something to the mast when you want to be rescued?"

"It'll be ten minutes before that cutter's alongside."

"Isn't there a frightfully strong smell of gas?"

"I told you the feed line was busted."

"Did you?" She raised her glass. "Well, here's to us, darling!"

They drank and he took the glasses and went back to the galley, masking its entrance entirely from her with his broad body. She saw him fumbling, his hands inside the galley near the gas stove, then searching in his pocket for a cigarette, then striking a match. Flame flared in his face, jerking up his head, smashing his skull against a brass hook screwed in the ceiling.

He was unquestionably bewildered and badly hurt and she sprang up as he stumbled toward her. For a shocked moment of horror she did absolutely nothing but then she wrenched an extinguisher from its holder and pumped it at the fire.

Edna said hysterically, "But it doesn't do any good, darling!"

She felt him fumbling behind her, hanging something on her shoulders which flopped heavily about her waist, and she recognized the life-belt which had lain on the bunk.

He began to drag her away from the flames and toward the forward doors. She dropped the extinguisher and turned and helped him, lurching up the steps and out onto the bridge. His strength began coming back to him as he half carried her aft along the narrow deck and into the cockpit, where he finally got the life-belt around her.

"Where's yours?" she asked.

A violent lurch shot him down against the locker which struck his already injured head and he said feebly, "Get into the water quick!"

With the full expectation of a shattering roar driving her frantic she loosened the belt, which seemed to weigh a ton. He still summoned up what reserve forces of strength he had left and fought her weakly as she forced the heavy life-belt on him and tightly knotted its straps.

"No!" he kept muttering almost insanely. "It's for you!" he cried while his fingers picked vainly at the hard knots. She found herself crying and the Coast Guard boat loomed a dark blur as she held him against the gunwale and said, "Don't —please don't worry about me. I'll be all right but you're hurt. I'll keep a hand on you, darling."

Then she shoved him backward and followed him over the side.

It was fully a week before Edna began to recover from the shock—the battering of ice-cold water, the deafening explosion of the *Blue Star,* the ring buoy slashing toward her from the deck of the cutter at the end of a line, the chief boatswain mate's kind ugly face telling her that Farwell was gone. Possibly, he had pointed out, the explosion—a piece of heavy wreckage—had killed him. She must be brave.

A month later she hired a plane and dropped a wreath of laurel leaves, with her tears, upon the sea.

it had to be murder

by . . . Cornell Woolrich

A convalescent, confined to his bedroom, goes hunting a dangerous killer he has yet to meet.

I DIDN'T know their names. I'd never heard their voices. I didn't even know them by sight, strictly speaking, for their faces were too small to fill in with identifiable features at that distance. Yet I could have constructed a timetable of their comings and goings, their daily habits and activities. They were the rear-window dwellers around me.

Sure I suppose it was a little bit like prying, could have been even mistaken for the fevered concentration of a Peeping Tom. That wasn't my fault, that wasn't the idea. The idea was, my movements were strictly limited just around this time. I could get from the window to the bed, and from the bed to the window, and that was all. The bay window was about the best feature my rear bedroom had in the warm weather. It was unscreened, so I had to sit with the light out or I would have had every insect in the vicinity in on me. I couldn't sleep, because I was used to getting plenty of exercise. I'd never acquired the habit of reading books to ward off boredom, so I hadn't that to turn to. Well, what should I do, sit there with my eyes tightly shuttered?

Just to pick a few at random.

Shortly after we bought publication rights to this story, Hedda Hopper announced a tremendous movie deal involving Jimmy Stewart, Alfred Hitchcock, Joshua Logan and Leland Hayward. The picture, tentatively titled REAR WINDOW, was by Mr. Woolrich about an invalid whose enforced study of his neighbors caused him to suspect one of them of murder. So if, sometime in the near future, you find yourself watching a movie whose plot seems oddly familiar, don't be surprised. It might be this one.

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Straight over, and the windows square, there was a young jitter-couple, kids in their teens, only just married. It would have killed them to stay home one night. They were always in such a hurry to go, wherever it was they went, they never remembered to turn out the lights. I don't think it missed once in all the time I was watching.

But they never forgot altogether, either. I was to learn to call this delayed action, as you will see. He'd always come skittering madly back in about five minutes, probably from all the way down in the street, and rush around killing the switches. Then fall over something in the dark on his way out. They gave me an inward chuckle, those two.

The next house down, the windows already narrowed a little with perspective. There was a certain light in that one that always went out each night too. Something about it, it used to make me a little sad. There was a woman living there with her child, a young widow I suppose. I'd see her put the child to bed, and then bend over and kiss her in a wistful sort of way. She'd shade the light off her and sit there painting her eyes and mouth. Then she'd go out. She'd never come back till the night was nearly spent. Once I was still up and I looked and she was sitting motionless there with her head buried in her arms. Something about it, it used to make me a little sad.

The third one down no longer offered any insight, the windows were just slits like in a medieval battlement, due to foreshortening. That brings us around to the one on the end. In that one frontal vision came back full-depth again, since it stood at right-angles to the rest, my own included, sealing up the inner hollow all these houses backed on. I could see into it, from the rounded projection of my bay-window, as freely as into a doll-house with its rear wall sliced away. And scaled down to about the same size.

It was a flat-building. Unlike all the rest it had been constructed originally as such, not just cut up into furnished rooms. It topped them by two stories and had rear fire escapes, to show for this distinction. But it was old, evidently hadn't shown a profit. It was in the process of being modernized.

Instead of clearing the entire building while the work was going on they were doing it a flat at a time in order to lose as little rental income as possible. Of the six rearward flats it offered to view, the topmost one had already been completed but not yet rented. They were working on the fifth-floor one now, disturbing the peace of everyone all up and down the "inside" of the block with their hammering and sawing.

I felt sorry for the couple in the flat below. I used to wonder how they stood it with that bedlam going on above their heads. To make it worse the wife was in chronic poor health too. I could tell that even at a distance by the listless way she moved about over there, and re-

mained in her bathrobe without dressing.

Sometimes I'd see her sitting by the window, holding her head. I used to wonder why he didn't have a doctor in to look her over but maybe they couldn't afford it. He seemed to be out of work. Often their bedroom light was on late at night behind the drawn shade, as though she were unwell and he was sitting up with her.

And one night in particular he must have had to sit up with her all night, it remained on until nearly daybreak. Not that I sat watching all that time. But the light was still burning at three in the morning when I finally transferred from chair to bed to see if I could get a little sleep myself. And when I failed to and hopscotched back again around dawn it was still peering wanly out behind the tan shade.

Moments later, with the first brightening of day, it suddenly dimmed around the edges of the shade and then shortly afterward not that one, but a shade in one of the other rooms—for all of them alike had been down—went up, and I saw him standing there looking out.

He was holding a cigarette in his hand. I couldn't see it but I could tell it was that by the quick, nervous little jerks with which he kept putting his hand to his mouth, and the haze I saw rising around his head. Worried about her, I guess. I didn't blame him for that. Any husband would have been. She must have only just dropped off to sleep, after night-long suffering. And then in another hour or so at the most, that sawing of wood and clattering of buckets was going to start in over them again. Well, it wasn't any of my business, I said to myself, but he really ought to get her out of there. If I had an ill wife on my hands . . .

He was leaning slightly out, maybe an inch past the window frame, carefully scanning the back faces of all the houses abutting on the hollow square that lay before him. You can tell, even at a distance, when a person is looking fixedly. There's something about the way the head is held.

And yet his scrutiny wasn't held fixedly to any one point, it was a slow, sweeping one, moving along the houses on the opposite side from me first. When it got to the end of them I knew it would cross over to my side and come back along there. Before it did I withdrew several yards inside my room to let it go safely by. I didn't want him to think I was sitting there prying into his affairs. There was still enough blue nightshade in my room to keep my slight withdrawal from catching his eye.

When I returned to my original position a moment or two later he was gone. He had raised two more of the shades. The bedroom one was still down. I wondered vaguely why he had given that peculiar comprehensive semicircular stare at all the rear windows around him. There wasn't anyone at any of them at such an hour. It wasn't important,

of course. It was just a little oddity, it failed to blend in with his being worried or disturbed about his wife.

When you're worried or disturbed, that's an internal preoccupation, you stare vacantly at nothing at all. When you stare around you in a great sweeping arc at windows, that betrays external preoccupation, outward interest. One doesn't quite jibe with the other. To call such a discrepancy trifling is to add to its importance. Only someone like me, stewing in a vacuum of total idleness, would have noticed at all.

The flat remained lifeless after that as far as could be judged by its windows. He must have either gone out or gone to bed himself. Three of the shades remained at normal height, the one masking the bedroom remained down. Sam, my day houseman, came in not long after with my eggs and morning paper and I had that to kill time with for a while. I stopped thinking about other people's windows and staring at them.

The sun slanted down on one side of the hollow oblong all morning long, then it shifted over to the other side for the afternoon. Then it started to slip off both alike and it was evening again—another day gone.

The lights started to come on around the quadrangle. Here and there a wall played back, like a sounding board, a snatch of radio program that was coming in too loud. If you listened carefully you could hear an occasional clink of dishes mixed in, faint, far off. The chain of little habits that were their lives unreeled themselves.

They were all bound in them tighter than the tightest straitjacket any jailer ever devised, though they all thought themselves free. The jitterbugs made their nightly dash for the great open spaces, forgot their lights, he came careening back, thumbed them out and their place was dark until the early morning hours. The woman put her child to bed, leaned mournfully over its cot, then sat down with heavy despair to redden her mouth.

In the fourth-floor flat at right angles to the long interior "street" the three shades had remained up and the fourth shade had remained at full length all day long. I hadn't been conscious of that because I hadn't particularly been looking at it or thinking of it until now. My eyes may have rested on those windows at times during the day but my thoughts had been elsewhere at those times.

It was only when a light suddenly went up in the end room behind one of the raised shades, which was their kitchen, that I realized that the shades had been untouched like that all day. That also brought something else to my mind that hadn't been in it until now. I hadn't seen the woman all day. I hadn't seen any sign of life within those windows until now.

He'd come in from outside. The entrance was at the opposite side of their kitchen, away from the window. He'd left his hat on so I

knew he'd just come in from the outside.

He didn't remove his hat. As though there was no one there to remove it for any more. Instead he pushed it farther to the back of his head by pronging a hand to the roots of his hair. That gesture didn't denote removal of perspiration, I knew. To do that a person makes a sidewise sweep—this was up over his forehead. It indicated some sort of harassment or uncertainty. Besides, if he'd been suffering from excess warmth, the first thing he would have done would be to take off his hat altogether.

She didn't come out to greet him. The first link, of the so-strong chain of habit, of custom, that binds us all, had snapped wide open.

She must be so ill she had remained in bed, in the room behind the lowered shade, all day. I watched. He remained where he was, two rooms away from there. Expectancy became surprise, surprise incomprehension. Funny, I thought, that he doesn't go in to her. Or at least go as far as the doorway, look in to see how she is.

Maybe she was asleep and he didn't want to disturb her. Then immediately—but how can he know for sure she's asleep without at least looking in at her? He just came in himself.

He came forward and stood there by the window as he had at dawn. Sam had carried out my tray quite some time before and my lights were out. I held my ground. I knew he couldn't see me within the darkness of the bay window. He stood there motionless for several minutes. And now his attitude was the proper one for inner preoccupation. He stood there looking downward at nothing, lost in thought.

He's worried about her, I said to myself, as any man would be. It's the most natural thing in the world. Funny, though, he should leave her in the dark like that without going near her. If he's worried, then why didn't he at least look in on her on returning? Here was another of those trivial discrepancies between inward motivation and outward indication. And just as I was thinking that, the original one that I had noted at daybreak repeated itself.

His head went up with renewed alertness and I could see it start to give that slow circular sweep of interrogation around the panorama of rearward windows again. True the light was behind him this time but there was enough of it falling on him to show me the microscopic but continuous shift of direction his head made in the process. I remained carefully immobile until the distant glance had passed me safely by. Motion attracts.

Why is he so interested in other people's windows, I wondered detachedly. And of course an effective brake to dwelling on that thought too lingeringly clamped down almost at once. *Look who's talking. What about you yourself?*

An important difference escaped me. I wasn't worried about anything. He presumably was.

Down came the shades again. The

lights stayed on behind their beige opaqueness. But behind the one that had remained down all along the room remained dark.

Time went by. Hard to say how much—a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes. A cricket chirped in one of the backyards. Sam came in to see if I wanted anything before he went home for the night. I told him no I didn't—it was all right, run along. He stood there for a minute, head down. Then I saw him shake it slightly, as if at something he didn't like. "What's the matter?" I asked.

"You know what that means? My old mammy told it to me, and she never told me a lie in her life. I never once seen it to miss either."

"What, the cricket?"

"Any time you hear one of them things, that's a sign of death—someplace close around."

I swept the back of my hand at him. "Well, it isn't in here so don't let it worry you."

He went out, muttering stubbornly, "It's somewhere close by though. Somewhere not very far off. Got to be there."

The door closed after him and I stayed there alone in the dark.

It was a stifling night, much closer than the one before. I could hardly get a breath of air even by the open window at which I sat. I wondered how he—that unknown over there—could stand it behind those drawn shades.

Then suddenly, just as idle speculation about this whole matter was about to alight on some fixed point in my mind, crystallize into something like suspicion, up came the shades again and off it flitted, as formless as ever and without having had a chance to come to rest on anything.

He was in the middle windows, the living-room. He'd taken off his coat and shirt, was bare-armed in his undershirt. He hadn't been able to stand it himself, I guess—the sultriness.

I couldn't make out what he was doing at first. He seemed to be busy in a perpendicular, up-and-down way rather than lengthwise. He remained in one place, but he kept dipping down out of sight and then straightening up into view again, at irregular intervals. It was almost like some sort of calisthenic exercise except that the dips and rises weren't evenly timed enough for that. Sometimes he'd stay down a long time, sometimes he'd bob right up again, sometimes he'd go down two or three times in rapid succession.

There was some sort of a wide-spread black V railing him off from the window. Whatever it was, there was just a sliver of it showing above the upward inclination to which the window-sill deflected my line of vision. All it did was strike off the bottom of his undershirt to the extent of a sixteenth of an inch maybe. But I hadn't seen it there at other times, and I couldn't tell what it was.

Suddenly he left it for the first time since the shades had gone up, came out around it to the outside,

stooped down into another part of the room, and straightened again with an armful of what looked like varicolored pennants at the distance at which I was. He went back behind the V and allowed them to fall across the top of it for a moment, and stay that way. He made one of his dips down out of sight and stayed that way a good while.

The "pennants" slung across the V kept changing color right in front of my eyes. I have very good sight. One moment they were white, the next red, the next blue.

Then I got it. They were a woman's dresses and he was pulling them down to him one by one, taking the topmost one each time. Suddenly they were all gone, the V was black and bare again and his torso had reappeared. I knew what it was now and what he was doing. The dresses had told me. He confirmed it for me. He spread his arms to the ends of the V, I could see him heave and hitch as if exerting pressure, and suddenly the V had folded up, become a cubed wedge. Then he made rolling motions with his whole upper body and the wedge disappeared off to one side.

He'd been packing a trunk, packing his wife's things into a large upright trunk.

He reappeared at the kitchen window presently, stood still for a moment. I saw him draw his arm across his forehead, not once but several times, and then whip the end of it off into space. Sure, it was hot work for such a night. Then he reached up along the wall and took something down. Since it was the kitchen he was in my imagination had to supply a cabinet and a bottle.

I could see the two or three quick passes his hand made to his mouth after that. I said to myself tolerantly, "That's what nine men out of ten would do after packing a trunk —take a good stiff drink." And if the tenth didn't, it would only be because he didn't have any liquor.

Then he came closer to the window again and standing edgewise to the side of it, so that only a thin paring of his head and shoulder showed, peered watchfully out into the dark quadrilateral along the line of windows, most of them unlighted by now once more. He always started on the left-hand side, the side opposite mine, and made his circuit of inspection from there on around.

That was the second time in one evening I'd seen him do that. And once at daybreak, made three times altogether. I smiled mentally. You'd almost think he felt guilty about something. It was probably nothing, just an odd little habit, a quirk he didn't know he had himself. I had them, everyone does.

He withdrew into the room again and it blacked out. His figure passed into the one that was still lighted next to it, the living-room. That blacked next. It didn't surprise me that the third room, the bedroom with the drawn shade, didn't light up on his entering there. He wouldn't want to disturb her, of

course—particularly if she was going away tomorrow for her health, as his packing of her trunk showed. She needed all the rest she could get, before making the trip. Simple enough for him to slip into bed in the dark.

It did surprise me, though, when a match-flare winked sometime later, to have it still come from the darkened living-room. He must be lying down in there, trying to sleep on a sofa or something for the night. He hadn't gone near the bedroom at all, was staying out of it altogether. That puzzled me frankly. That was carrying solicitude almost too far.

Ten minutes or so later there was another match-wink, still from that same living-room window. He couldn't sleep.

The night brooded down on both of us alike, the curiosity-monger in the bay window, the chain-smoker in the fourth-floor flat, without giving any answer. The only sound was that interminable cricket.

II

I was back at the window again with the first sun of morning. Not because of him. My mattress was like a bed of hot coals. Sam found me there when he came in to get things ready for me.

"You're going to be a wreck, Mr. Jeff," was all he said.

For awhile there was no sign of life over there. Then suddenly I saw his head bob up from somewhere down out of sight in the living-room, so I knew I'd been right, he'd spent the night on a sofa or easy chair in there. Now, of course, he'd look in at her, to see how she was, find out if she felt any better. That was only common ordinary humanity. He hadn't been near her, so far as I could make out, since two nights before.

He didn't. He dressed, and he went in the opposite direction, into the kitchen, and wolfed something in there, standing up and using both hands. Then he suddenly turned and moved offside, in the direction in which I knew the flat-entrance to be, as if he had just heard some summons, like the doorbell.

Sure enough, in a moment he came back and there were two men with him in leather aprons. Expressmen. I saw him standing by while they laboriously maneuvered that cubed black wedge out between them in the direction they'd just come from. He did more than just stand by. He practically hovered over them, kept shifting from side to side, he was so anxious to see that it was done right.

Then he came back alone and I saw him swipe his arm across his head, as though it was he, not they, who was all heated up from the effort.

So he was forwarding her trunk, to wherever it was she was going. That was all.

He reached up along the wall again and took something down. He was taking another drink. Two. Three. I said to myself, a little at a loss, yes, but he hasn't just packed a trunk this time. That trunk has been standing packed and ready

since last night. Where does the hard work come in? The sweat and the need for a bracer?

Now at last, after all those hours, he finally did go in to her. I saw his form pass through the living-room and go beyond into the bedroom. Up went the shade that had been down all this time. Then he turned his head and looked around behind him. In a certain way, a way that was unmistakable, even from where I was. Not in one certain direction as one looks at a person. But from side to side and up and down and all around, as one looks at—*an empty room.*

He stepped back, bent a little, gave a fling of his arms and an unoccupied mattress and bedding upended over the foot of a bed, stayed that way, emptily curved. A second one followed a moment later.

She wasn't in there.

They use the expression "delayed action." I found out then what it meant. For two days a sort of formless uneasiness, a disembodied suspicion, I don't know what to call it, had been flitting and volplaning around in my mind like an insect looking for a landing place.

More than once, just as it had been ready to settle, some slight thing, some slight reassuring thing, such as the raising of the shades after they had been down unnaturally long, had been enough to keep it winging aimlessly, prevent it from staying still long enough for me to recognize it.

The point of contact had been there all along, waiting to receive it. Now, for some reason, within a split second after he tossed over the empty mattresses, it landed—*zoom!* And the point of contact expanded—or exploded, whatever you care to call it—into a certainty of murder.

In other words the rational part of my mind was far behind the instinctive subconscious part. Delayed action. Now the one had caught up to the other. The thought-message that sparked from the synchronization was, *He's done something to her!*

I looked down and my hand was bunching the goods over my kneecap, it was knotted so tight. I forced it to open. I said to myself, steadyingly, *Now wait a minute, be careful, go slow. You've seen nothing. You know nothing. You only have the negative proof that you don't see her any more.*

Sam was standing there, looking over at me from the pantryway. He said accusingly, "You ain't touched a thing. And your face looks like a sheet."

It felt like one. It had that needling feeling, when the blood has left it involuntarily. It was more to get him out of the way and give myself some elbow room for undisturbed thinking than anything else, that I said, "Sam, what's the street address of that building down there? Don't stick your head too far out and gape at it."

"Somep'n or other Benedict Avenue." He scratched his neck helpfully.

"I know that. Chase around the

corner a minute and get me the exact number on it, will you?"

"Why you want to know that for?" he asked as he turned to go.

"None of your business," I said with the good-natured firmness that was all that was necessary to take care of that once and for all. I called after him just as he was closing the door, "And while you're about it step into the entrance and see if you can tell from the mail-boxes who has the fourth-floor rear. Don't get me the wrong one now. And try not to let anyone catch you at it."

He went out, mumbling something that sounded like, "When a man ain't got nothing to do but just sit all day he sure can think up the blamest things—" The door closed and I settled down to some good constructive thinking.

I decided to compute what I had to go on. 1. The lights were on all night the first night. 2. He came in later than usual the second night. 3. He left his hat on. 4 She didn't come out to greet him—she hadn't appeared since the evening before the lights were on all night. 5. He took a drink after he finished packing her trunk. But he took three stiff drinks the next morning, immediately after her trunk went out. 6. He was inwardly disturbed and worried, yet superimposed upon this was an unnatural external concern about the surrounding rear windows that was off-key. 7. He slept in the living-room, didn't go near the bedroom, during the night before the departure of the trunk.

Very well. If she had been ill that first night and he had sent her away for health, that automatically canceled-out points 1, 2, 3, 4. It left points 5 and 6 totally unimportant and unincriminating. But when it came up against 7 it hit a stumbling-block.

If she went away immediately after being ill that first night, why didn't he want to sleep in their bedroom *last night?* Sentiment? Hardly. Two perfectly good beds in one room, only a sofa or uncomfortable easy chair in the other. Why should he stay out of there, if she was already gone? Just because he missed her, was lonely? A grown man doesn't act that way. All right, then she was still in there.

Sam came back parenthetically at this point and said, "That house is Number five twenty-five Benedict Avenue. The fourth-floor rear, it got the name of Mr. and Mrs. Lars Thorwald up."

"Sh-h," I silenced and motioned him backhand out of my ken.

"First he want it, then he don't," he grumbled philosophically, and retired to his duties.

I went ahead digging at it. But if she was still in there, in that bedroom last night, then she couldn't have gone away to the country, because I never saw her leave today. She could have left without my seeing her in the early hours of yesterday morning. I'd missed a few hours, been asleep. But this morning I had been up before he was himself, I only saw his head rear

up from that sofa after I'd been at the window for some time.

To go at all, she would have had to go yesterday morning. Then why had he left the bedroom shade down, left the mattresses undisturbed, until today? Above all, why had he stayed out of that room last night? That was evidence that she hadn't gone, was still in there. Then today, immediately after the trunk had been dispatched, he went in, pulled up the shade, tossed over the mattresses and showed that she hadn't been in there. The thing was like a crazy spiral.

No, it wasn't either. *Immediately after the trunk had been dispatched he had—*

The trunk.

That did it.

I looked around to make sure the door was safely closed between Sam and me. My hand hovered uncertainly over the telephone dial a minute. Boyne, he'd be the one to tell about it. He was on Homicide. He had been, anyway, when I'd last seen him. I didn't want to get a flock of strange dicks and cops into my hair. I didn't want to be involved any more than I had to. Or at all, if possible.

They switched my call to the right place after a couple of wrong tries and I got him finally.

"Look, Boyne? This is Hal Jeffries—"

"Well, where've you been the last sixty-two years?" he started to enthuse.

We can take that up later. What I want you to do now is, take down a name and address. Ready? Lars Thorwald. Five twenty-five Benedict Avenue. Fourth-floor rear. Got it?"

"Fourth-floor rear. Got it. What's it for?"

"Investigation. I've got a firm belief you'll uncover a murder there if you start digging at it. Don't call on me for anything more than that —just a conviction. There's been a man and wife living there until now. Now there's just the man. Her trunk went out early this morning. If you can find someone who saw *her* leave herself—"

Marshaled aloud like that and conveyed to somebody else, a lieutenant of detectives above all, it did sound flimsy, even to me. He said hesitantly, "Well, but—" Then he accepted it as was. Because I was the source. I even left my window out of it completely. I could do that with him and get away with it because he'd known me years, he didn't question my reliability. I didn't want my room all cluttered up with dicks and cops taking turns nosing out of the window in this hot weather. Let them tackle it from the front.

"Well, we'll see what we see," he said. "I'll keep you posted."

I hung up and sat back to watch and wait events. I had a grandstand seat. Or rather a grandstand seat in reverse. I could only see from behind the scenes but not from the front. I couldn't watch Boyne go to work. I could only see the results when and if there were any.

Nothing happened for the next few hours. The police work that I

knew must be going on was as invisible as police work should be. The figure in the fourth-floor windows remained in sight, alone and undisturbed. He didn't go out. He was restless, roamed from room to room without staying in one place very long but he stayed in. Once I saw him eating again—sitting down this time—and once he shaved and once he even tried to read the paper but he didn't stay with it long.

Little unseen wheels were in motion around him. Small and harmless as yet, preliminaries. If he knew, I wondered to myself, would he remain there quiescent like that, or would he try to bolt out and flee? That mightn't depend so much upon his guilt as upon his sense of immunity, his feeling that he could outwit them. Of his guilt I myself was already convinced, or I wouldn't have taken the step I had.

At three my phone rang. Boyne calling back. "Jeffries? Well, I don't know. Can't you give me a little more than just a bald statement like that?"

"Why?" I fenced. "Why do I have to?"

"I've had a man over there making inquiries. I've just had his report. The building superintendent and several of the neighbors all agree she left for the country, to try and regain her health, early yesterday morning."

"Wait a minute. Did any of them *see* her leave, according to your man?" I asked.

"No."

"Then all you've got is a second-hand version of an unsupported statement by him. Not an eye-witness-account."

"He was met returning from the depot, after he'd bought her ticket and seen her off on the train."

"That's still an unsupported statement, once removed."

"I've sent a man down there to the station to try and check with the ticket agent if possible. After all, he should have been fairly conspicuous at that early hour. And we're keeping him under observation, of course, in the meantime, watching all his movements. The first chance we get we're going to jump in and search the place."

I had a feeling that they wouldn't find anything even if they did.

"Don't expect anything more from me. I've dropped it in your lap. I've given you all I have to give. A name, an address, and an opinion."

"Yes, and I've always valued your opinion highly before now, Jeff—"

"But now you don't, that it?"

"Not at all. The thing is we haven't turned up anything that seems to bear out your impression so far."

"You haven't got very far along, so far."

He went back to his previous cliché. "Well, we'll see what we see. Let you know later."

Another hour or so went by and sunset came on. I saw him start to get ready to go out. He put on his hat, put his hand in his pocket and stood still looking at it for a minute. Counting change, I guess.

It gave me a peculiar sense of suppressed excitement, knowing they were going to come in the minute he left. I thought grimly, as I saw him take a last look around, *If you've got anything to hide, brother, now's the time to hide it.*

He left. A breath-holding interval of misleading emptiness descended on the flat. A three-alarm fire couldn't have pulled my eyes off those windows. Suddenly the door by which he had just left parted slightly and two men insinuated themselves, one behind the other. There they were now. They closed it behind them, separated at once and got busy.

One took the bedroom, one the kitchen, and they started to work their way toward one another again from those extremes of the flat. They were thorough. I could see them going over everything from top to bottom. They took the living-room together. One cased one side, the other man the other.

They'd already finished before the warning caught them. I could tell that by the way they straightened up and stood facing one another frustratedly for a minute. Then both their heads turned sharply, as at a tip-off by doorbell that he was coming back. They got out fast.

I wasn't unduly disheartened, I'd expected that. My own feeling all along had been that they wouldn't find anything incriminating around. The trunk had gone.

He came in with a mountainous brown-paper bag sitting in the curve of one arm. I watched him closely to see if he'd discover that someone had been there in his absence. Apparently he didn't. They'd been adroit about it.

He stayed in the rest of the night. Sat tight, safe and sound. He did some desultory drinking. I could see him sitting there by the window and his hand would hoist every once in awhile but not to excess. Apparently everything was under control, the tension had eased now that—the trunk was out.

Watching him across the night I speculated, *Why doesn't he get out? If I'm right about him, and I am, why does he stick around—after it?* That brought its own answer: *Because he doesn't know anyone's on to him yet. He doesn't think there's any hurry. To go too soon, right after she has, would be more dangerous than to stay awhile.*

III

The night wore on. I sat there waiting for Boyne's call. It came later than I thought it would. I picked the phone up in the dark. He was getting ready to go to bed over there now. He'd risen from where he'd been sitting drinking in the kitchen and put the light out. He went into the living-room, lit that. He started to pull his shirt-tail up out of his belt. Boyne's voice was in my ear as my eyes were on him over there. Three-cornered arrangement.

"Hello, Jeff? Listen, absolutely nothing. We searched the place while he was out—"

"I know you did, I saw it," I

nearly said and checked myself in time.

"—and didn't turn up a thing. But—" He stopped as though this was going to be important. I waited impatiently for him to go ahead.

"Downstairs in his letterbox we found a postcard waiting for him. We fished it up out of the slot with bent pins—"

"And?"

"And it was from his wife, written only yesterday from some farm up-country. Here's the message we copied—'Arrived O.K. Already feeling a little better. Love, Anna.'"

I said, faintly but stubbornly, "You say written only yesterday. Have you proof of that? What was the postmark-date on it?"

He made a disgusted sound down in his tonsils. At me, not it. "The postmark was blurred. A corner of it got wet and the ink smudged."

"All of it blurred?"

"The year-date," he admitted. "The hour and the month came out O.K. August. And seven thirty P.M., it was mailed at."

This time I made the disgusted sound, in my larynx. "August, seven thirty P.M.—nineteen thirty-seven or thirty-nine or forty. You have no proof how it got into that mailbox, whether it came from a letter-carrier's pouch or from the back of some bureau-drawer!"

"Give up, Jeff," he said. "There's such a thing as going too far."

I don't know what I would have said. That is, if I hadn't happened to have my eyes on the Thorwald-flat living-room windows just then. Probably very little. The postcard *had* shaken me, whether I admitted it or not. But I was looking over there. The light had gone out as soon as he'd taken his shirt off. But the bedroom didn't light up. A match-flare winked from the living-room, low down, as from an easy chair or sofa. With two unused beds in the bedroom he was *still staying out of there.*

"Boyne," I said in a glassy voice, "I don't care what postcards from the other world you've turned up. I say that man has done away with his wife! Trace that trunk he shipped out. Open it up when you've located it—and I think you'll find her!"

And I hung up without waiting to hear what he was going to do about it. He didn't ring back, so I suspected he was going to give my suggestion a spin after all, in spite of his loudly proclaimed skepticism.

I stayed there by the window all night, keeping a sort of death-watch. There were two more match-flares after the first at about half-hour intervals. Nothing more after that. So possibly he was asleep over there. Possibly not. I had to sleep sometime myself and I finally succumbed in the flaming light of the early sun. Anything that he was going to do he would have done under cover of darkness and not waited for broad daylight. There wouldn't be anything much to watch for awhile now. And what was there that he needed to do any more, any-

way? Nothing, just sit tight and let a little disarming time slip by.

It seemed like five minutes later that Sam came over and touched me but it was already high noon. I said irritably, "Didn't you lamp that note I pinned up, for you to let me sleep?"

He said, "Yeah, but it's your old friend Inspector Boyne. I figured you'd sure want to—"

It was a personal visit this time. Boyne came into the room behind him without waiting and without much cordiality.

I said to get rid of Sam, "Go inside and boil a couple of eggs."

Boyne began in a galvanized-iron voice, "Jeff, what do you mean by doing anything like this to me? I've made a fool of myself thanks to you. Sending my men out right and left on wild-goose chases. Thank God, I didn't put my foot in it any worse than I did and have this guy picked up and brought in for questioning."

"Oh, then you don't think that's necessary?" I suggested dryly.

The look he gave me took care of that. "I'm not alone in the department, you know. There are men over me I'm accountable to for my actions. That looks great, don't it, sending one of my fellows one-half-a-day's train ride up into the sticks to some God-forsaken whistle-stop or other at departmental expense—"

"Then you located the trunk?"

"We traced it through the express agency," he said flatly.

"And you opened it?"

"We did better than that. He got in touch with the various farmhouses in the immediate locality and Mrs. Thorwald came down to the junction in a produce-truck from one of them and opened it for him herself with her own keys!"

Very few men have ever got a look from an old friend such as I got from him. At the door he said, stiff as a rifle-barrel, "Just let's forget all about it, shall we? That's about the kindest thing either one of us can do for the other. You're not yourself and I'm out a little of my own pocket-money, time and temper. Let's let it go at that. If you want to telephone me in future I'll be glad to give you my home number."

The door went *whopp!* behind him.

For about ten minutes after he stormed out my numbed mind was in a sort of straitjacket. Then it started to wriggle its way free. *The hell with the police. I can't prove it to them, maybe, but I can prove it to myself, one way or the other, once and for all. Either I'm wrong or I'm right. He's got his armor on against them. But his back is naked and unprotected against me.*

I called Sam in. "Whatever became of that spyglass we used to have when we were bumming around on that cabin-cruiser that season?"

He found it someplace downstairs and came in with it, blowing on it and rubbing it along his sleeve. I let it lie idle in my lap first. I took a piece of paper and a pencil

and wrote six words on it—*What have you done with her?*

I sealed it in an envelope and left the envelope blank. I said to Sam, "Now here's what I want you to do and I want you to be slick about it. You take this, go in that building five twenty-five, climb the stairs to the fourth-floor rear and ease it under the door. You're fast, at least you used to be. Let's see if you're fast enough to keep from being caught at it. Then when you get safely down again, give the outside doorbell a little poke to attract attention."

His mouth started to open.

"And don't ask me any questions, you understand? I'm not fooling."

He went, and I got the spyglass ready.

I got him in the right focus after a minute or two. A face leaped up, and I was really seeing him for the first time. Dark-haired but unmistakably Scandinavian ancestry. Looked like a sinewy customer although he didn't run to much bulk.

About five minutes went by. His head turned sharply profilewards. That was the bell-poke right there. The note must be in already.

He gave me the back of his head as he went back toward the flat-door. The lens could follow him all the way to the rear, where my unaided eyes hadn't been able to before.

He opened the door first, missed seeing it, looked out on a level. He closed it. Then he dipped, straightened up. He had it. I could see him turning it this way and that in his hands.

He shifted in, away from the door, nearer the window. He thought danger lay near the door, safety away from it. He didn't know it was the other way around, the deeper into his own rooms he retreated the greater the danger.

He'd torn it open, he was reading it. God, how I watched his expression. My eyes clung to it like leeches. There was a sudden widening, a pulling—the whole skin of his face seemed to stretch back behind the ears, narrowing his eyes to Mongoloids. Shock. Panic. His hand pushed out and found the wall and he braced himself with it. Then he went back toward the door.

I could see him creeping up on it, stalking it as though it were something alive. He opened it so slenderly you couldn't see it at all, peered fearfully through the crack. Then he closed it and came back, zig-zag, off-balance from sheer reflex dismay. He toppled into a chair and snatched up a drink. Out of the bottle-neck itself this time. And even while he was holding it to his lips his head was turned looking over his shoulder at the door that had suddenly thrown his secret in his face.

I put the glass down.

Guilty! Guilty as all hell and the police be damned!

My hand started toward the phone, came back again. What was the use? They wouldn't listen now any more than they had before.

"You should have seen his face, etc." And I could hear Boyne's answer. "Anyone gets a jolt from an anonymous letter, true or false. You would yourself." They had a real live Mrs. Thorwald to show me—or thought they had. I'd have to show them the dead one to prove that they both weren't one and the same. I, from my window, had to show them a body.

Well, he'd have to show me first.

It took hours before I got it. I kept pegging away at it, pegging away at it, while the afternoon wore away. Meanwhile he was pacing back and forth there like a caged panther. Two minds with but one thought, turned inside-out in my case. How to keep it hidden, how to see that it wasn't kept hidden.

I was afraid he might try to light out but if he intended doing that he was going to wait until after dark, apparently, so I had a little time yet. Possibly he didn't want to himself, unless he was driven to it—still felt that it was more dangerous than to stay.

The customary sights and sounds around me went on unnoticed while the main stream of my thoughts pounded like a torrent against that one obstacle stubbornly damming them up—how to get him to give the location away to me so that I could give it away in turn to the police.

I was dimly conscious, I remember, of the landlord or somebody bringing in a prospective tenant to look at the sixth-floor apartment, the one that had already been finished. This was two over Thorwald's. They were still at work on the in-between one. At one point an odd little bit of synchronization, completely accidental of course, cropped up. Landlord and tenant both happened to be near the living-room windows on the sixth at the same moment that Thorwald was near those on the fourth.

Both parties moved onward simultaneously into the kitchen from there and, passing the blind spot of the wall, appeared next at the kitchen windows. It was uncanny, they were almost like precision-strollers or puppets manipulated on one and the same string. It probably wouldn't have happened again just like that in another fifty years. Immediately afterwards they digressed, never to repeat themselves again.

The thing was, something about it had disturbed me. There had been some slight flaw or hitch to mar its smoothness. I tried for a moment or two to figure out what it had been and couldn't. The landlord and tenant had gone now and only Thorwald was in sight. My unaided memory wasn't enough to recapture it for me. My eyesight might have if it had been repeated but it wasn't.

It sank into my subconscious, to ferment there like yeast while I went back to the main problem at hand.

I got it finally. It was well after dark but I finally hit on a way. It mightn't work, it was cumbersome and roundabout, but it was the

only way I could think of. An alarmed turn of the head, a quick precautionary step in one certain direction, was all I needed. And to get this brief, flickering, transitory give-away, I needed two phone calls and an absence of about half an hour on his part between them.

I leafed a directory by matchlight until I'd found what I wanted: *Thorwald, Lars. 525 Benedict. . . . Swansea 52114.*

I blew out the match, picked up the phone in the dark. It was like television. I could see to the other end of my call, only not along the wire but by a direct channel of vision from window to window.

He said, "Hullo?" gruffly.

I thought, *How strange this is. I've been accusing him of murder for three days straight and only now I'm hearing his voice for the first time.*

I didn't try to disguise my own voice. After all, he'd never see me and I'd never see him. I said, "You got my note?"

He said guardedly, "Who is this?"

"Just somebody who happens to know."

He said craftily, "Know what?"

"Know what you know. You and I, we're the only ones."

He controlled himself well. I didn't hear a sound. But he didn't know he was open another way too. I had the glass balanced there at proper height on two large books on the sill. Through the window I saw him pull open the collar of his shirt as though its stricture was intolerable. Then he backed his hand over his eyes like you do when there's a light blinding you.

His voice came back firm. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Business, that's what I'm talking about. It should be worth something to me, shouldn't it? To keep it from going any further." I wanted to keep him from catching on that it was the windows. I still needed them, I needed them now more than ever. "You weren't very careful about your door the other night. Or maybe the draft swung it a little open."

That hit him where he lived. Even the stomach-heave reached me over the wire. "You didn't see anything. There wasn't anything to see."

"That's up to you. Why should I go to the police?" I coughed a little. "If it would pay me not to."

"Oh," he said. And there was relief of a sort in it. "D'you want to —see me? Is that it?"

"That would be the best way, wouldn't it? How much can you bring with you for now?"

"I've only got about seventy dollars around here."

"All right, then we can arrange the rest for later. Do you know where Lakeside Park is? I'm near there now. Suppose we make it there." That was about thirty minutes away. Fifteen there and fifteen back. "There's a little pavilion as you go in."

"How many of you are there?" he asked cautiously.

"Just me. It pays to keep things to yourself. That way you don't have to divvy up."

He seemed to like that too. "I'll take a run out," he said, "just to see what it's all about.

I watched him more closely than ever, after he'd hung up. He flitted straight through to the end room, the bedroom, that he didn't go near any more. He disappeared into a clothes-closet in there, stayed a minute, came out again. He must have taken something out of a hidden cranny or niche in there that even the dicks had missed. I could tell by the piston-like motion of his hand, just before it disappeared inside his coat, what it was. A gun.

It's a good thing, I thought, I'm not out there in Lakeside Park, waiting for my seventy dollars.

The place blacked and he was on his way to the Park.

I called Sam in. "I want you to do something for me that's a little risky. In fact, damn risky. You might break a leg or you might get shot or you might even get pinched. We've been together ten years and I wouldn't ask you anything like that if I could do it myself. But I can't and it's got to be done." Then I told him, "Go out the back way, cross the backyard fences and see if you can get into that fourth-floor flat up the fire escape. He's left one of the windows a little down from the top."

"What do you want me to look for?"

"Nothing." The police had been there already, so what was the good of that? "There are three rooms over there. I want you to disturb everything just a little bit in all three, to show someone's been in there. Turn up the edge of each rug a little, shift every chair and table around a little, leave the closet doors standing out. Don't pass up a thing. Here, keep your eyes on this."

I took off my own wristwatch, strapped it on him. "You've got twenty-five minutes, starting from now. If you stay within those twenty-five minutes nothing will happen to you. When you see they're up don't wait any longer, get out and get out fast."

"Climb back down?"

"No." He wouldn't remember, in his excitement, if he'd left the windows up or not. And I didn't want him to connect danger with the back of his place, but with the front. I wanted to keep my own window out of it. "Latch the window down tight, let yourself out the door and beat it out the front way."

"I'm just an easy mark for you," he said ruefully but he went.

He came out through our own basement door below me, and scrambled over the fences. If anyone had challenged him from one of the surrounding windows I was going to backstop for him, explain I'd sent him down to look for something. But no one did. He made it pretty good for anyone his age. He isn't so young any more. Even the fire escape backing the flat, which was drawn up short, he managed to contact by standing up on something. He got in, lit the light, looked over at me. I motioned

him to go ahead and not weaken.

I watched him at it. There wasn't any way I could protect him now that he was in there. Even Thorwald would be within his rights in shooting him down—this was break and entry. I had to stay in back behind the scenes like I had been all along. I couldn't get out in front of him as a lookout and shield him. Even the dicks had had a lookout posted.

He must have been tense doing it. I was twice as tense watching him do it. The twenty-five minutes took fifty to go by. Finally he came over to the window, latched it fast. The lights went and he was out. He'd made it. I blew out a bellyful of breath that was twenty-five minutes in my lungs.

I heard him keying the street-door and when he came up I said warningly, "Leave the light out in here. Go and build yourself a great big two-story whiskey-punch. You're as close to white as you'll ever be."

Thorwald came back twenty-nine minutes after he'd left for Lakeside Park. A pretty slim margin to hang a man's life on. So now for the finale of the long-winded business, and here was hoping. I got my second phone-call in before he had time to notice anything amiss. It was tricky timing but I'd been sitting there with the receiver ready in my hand, dialing the number over and over, then killing it each time. He came in on the 2 of 52114, and I saved that much time. The ring started before his hand came away from the light-switch.

This was the one that was going to tell the story.

"You were supposed to bring money, not a gun, that's why I didn't show up." I saw the jolt that threw into him. The window still had to stay out of it. "I saw you tap the inside of your coat, where you had it, as you came out on the street." Maybe he hadn't but he wouldn't remember by now whether he had or not. You usually do when you're packing a gun and aren't an habitual carrier.

"Too bad you had your trip out and back for nothing. I didn't waste my time while you were gone though. I know more now than I knew before." This was the important part. I had the glass up and I was practically fluoroscoping him. "I've found out where—it is. You know what I mean. I know now where you've got—it. I was there while you were out."

Not a word. Just quick breathing in my ear.

"Don't you believe me? Look around. Put the receiver down and take a look for yourself. I found it, all right."

He put it down, moved as far as the living-room entrance and touched off the lights. He just looked around him once in a sweeping, all-embracing stare that didn't come to a head on any one fixed point, didn't center at all.

He was smiling grimly when he came back to the phone. All he said softly and with malignant satisfaction was, "You're a liar."

Then I saw him lay the receiver

down and take his hand off it. I hung up at my end.

The test had failed. And yet it hadn't. He hadn't given the location away as I'd hoped he would. And yet that, "You're a liar," was a tacit admission that it was there to be found, somewhere around him, somewhere on those premises. In such a good place that he didn't have to worry about it, didn't even have to look to make sure.

So there was a kind of sterile victory in my defeat. But it wasn't worth a damn to me.

He was standing there with his back to me and I couldn't see what he was doing. I knew the phone was somewhere in front of him but I thought he was just standing there pensive behind it. His head was slightly lowered, that was all. I'd hung up at my end. I didn't even see his elbow move. And if his index finger did I couldn't see it.

He stood like that a moment or two, then finally he moved aside. The lights went out over there. I lost him. He was careful not even to strike matches, like he sometimes did in the dark.

My mind no longer distracted by having him to look at, I turned to trying to recapture something else—that troublesome little hitch in synchronization that had occurred this afternoon, when the renting agent and he both moved simultaneously from one window to the next.

The closest I could get was this—it was like when you're looking at someone through a pane of imperfact glass, and a flaw in the glass distorts the symmetry of the reflected image for a second, until it has gone on past that point. Yet that wouldn't do, that was not it. The windows had been open and there had been no glass between. And I hadn't been using the lens at the time.

My phone rang. Boyne, I supposed. It wouldn't be anyone else at this hour. Maybe, after reflecting on the way he'd jumped all over me —I said, "Hello," unguardedly in my own normal voice.

There wasn't any answer.

I said, "Hello? Hello? Hello?" I kept giving away samples of my voice.

There wasn't a sound from first to last.

I hung up finally. It was still dark over there, I noticed.

IV

Sam looked in to check out. He was a bit thick-tongued from his restorative drink. He said something about, "Awri' if I go now?" I half-heard him. I was trying to figure out another way of trapping *him* over there into giving away the right spot. I motioned my consent absently.

He went a little unsteadily down the stairs to the ground-floor and after a delaying moment or two I heard the street-door close after him. Poor Sam, he wasn't much used to liquor.

I was left alone in the house, one chair the limit of my freedom of movement.

Suddenly a light went on over

there again, just momentarily, to go right out again afterwards. He must have needed it for something, to locate something he had already been looking for and found he wasn't able to put his hands on readily without it. He found it, whatever it was, almost immediately and moved back at once to put the lights out again. As he turned to do so I saw him give a glance out the window. He didn't come to the window to do it, he just shot it out in passing.

Something about it struck me as different from any of the others I'd seen him give in all the time I'd been watching him. If you can qualify such an elusive thing as a glance, I would have termed it a glance with a purpose. It was certainly anything but vacant or random, it had a bright spark of fixity in it. It wasn't one of those precautionary sweeps I'd seen him give either. It hadn't started over on the other side and worked its way around to my side, the right. It had hit dead-center at my bay-window for just a split second while it lasted, then was gone again. And the lights were gone, he was gone.

Sometimes your senses take things in without your mind translating them into their proper meaning. My eyes saw that look. My mind refused to smelter it properly. "It was meaningless," I thought. "An unintentional bull's-eye that just happened to hit square over here as he went toward the lights on his way out."

Delayed action. A wordless ring of the phone. To test a voice? A period of bated darkness following that, in which two could have played at the same game — stalking one another's window-squares, unseen. A last-moment flicker of the lights that was bad strategy but unavoidable. A parting glance, radioactive with malignant intention. All these things sank in without fusing. My eyes did their job, it was my mind that didn't—or at least took its time about it.

Seconds went by in packages of sixty. It was very still around the familiar quadrangle formed by the back of the houses. Sort of a breathless stillness. And then a sound came into it, starting up from nowhere, nothing. The unmistakable spaced clicking a cricket makes in the silence of the night. I thought of Sam's superstition about them, that he claimed had never failed to fulfill itself yet. If that was the case it looked bad for somebody in one of these slumbering houses around here—

Sam had been gone only about ten minutes. And now he was back again, he must have forgotten something. That drink was responsible. Maybe his hat or maybe even the key to his own quarters uptown. He knew I couldn't come down and let him in and he was trying to be quiet about it, thinking perhaps I'd dozed off.

All I could hear was this faint jiggling down at the lock of the front door. It was one of those old-fashioned stoop houses with an outer pair of storm doors that were

allowed to swing free all night, then a small vestibule, and then the inner door, worked by a simple iron key. The liquor had made his hand a little unreliable although he'd had this difficulty once or twice before, even without it. A match would have helped him find the keyhole quicker but then Sam doesn't smoke. I knew he wasn't likely to have one on him.

The sound had stopped now. He must have given up, gone away again, decided to let whatever it was go until tomorrow. He hadn't got in, because I knew his noisy way of letting doors coast shut by themselves too well, and there hadn't been any sound of that sort, that loose slap he always made.

Then suddenly it exploded. Why at this particular moment I don't know. That was some mystery of the inner workings of my own mind. It flashed like waiting gunpowder which a spark has finally reached along a slow train. Drove all thoughts of Sam and the front door and this and that completely out of my head. It had been waiting there since midafternoon today and only now—More of that delayed action. Damn that delayed action.

The renting agent and Thorwald had both started even from the living-room window. An intervening gap of blind wall and both had reappeared at the kitchen window, still one above the other. But some sort of a hitch or flaw or jump had taken place right there that bothered me. The eye is a reliable surveyor. There wasn't anything the matter with their timing, it was with their parallel-ness, or whatever the word is. The hitch had been vertical, not horizontal. There had been an upward "jump."

Now I had it, now I knew. And it couldn't wait. It was too good. They wanted a body? Now I had one for them.

Sore or not Boyne would *have* to listen to me now. I didn't waste any time, I dialed his precinct-house then and there in the dark, working the slots in my lap by memory alone. They didn't make much noise going around, just a light click. Not even as distinct as that cricket out there—

"He went home long ago," the desk sergeant said.

This couldn't wait. "All right, give me his home phone number."

He took a minute, came back again. "Trafalgar," he said. Then nothing more.

"Well? Trafalgar what?" Not a sound.

"Hello? Hello?" I tapped it. "Operator, I've been cut off. Give me that party again." I couldn't get her either.

I hadn't been cut off. My wire had been cut. That had been too sudden, right in the middle of—And to be cut like that it would have to be done somewhere right here inside the house with me. Outside it went underground.

Delayed action. This time final, fatal, altogether too late. A voiceless ring of the phone. A direction-finder of a look from over there. "Sam"

seemingly trying to get back in a while ago.

Sure, death was somewhere inside the house here with me. And I couldn't move, I couldn't get up out of this chair. Even if I had got through to Boyne just now it would have been too late. There wasn't time enough for one of those camera-finishes in this. I could have shouted out the window to that gallery of sleeping rear-window neighbors around me, I supposed. It would have brought them to the windows. It couldn't have brought them over here in time. By the time they had even figured which particular house it was coming from it would stop again, be over with. I didn't open my mouth. Not because I was brave but because it was so obviously useless.

He'd be up in a minute. He must be on the stairs now, although I couldn't hear him. Not even a creak. A creak would have been a relief, would have placed him. This was like being shut up in the dark with the silence of a gliding cobra.

There wasn't a weapon in the place with me. There were books there on the wall in the dark within reach. Me, who never read. The former owner's books. There was a bust of Rousseau or Montesquieu, I'd never been able to decide which, one of those gents with flowing manes, topping them. It was a monstrosity, bisque clay, but it too dated from before my occupancy.

I arched my middle upward from the chair-seat and clawed desperately up at it. Twice my fingertips slipped off it, then at the third raking I got it to teeter and the fourth brought it down into my lap, punching me down into the chair. There was a steamer-rug under me. I didn't need it around me in this weather, I'd been using it to soften the seat of the chair.

I tugged it out from under and mantled it around me like an Indian brave's blanket. Then I squirmed far down in the chair, let my head and one shoulder dangle out over the arm, on the side next to the wall. I hoisted the bust to my other, upward shoulder, balanced it there precariously for a second head, blanket tucked around its ears. From the back, in the dark, it would look —I hoped.

I proceeded to breathe adenoidally, like someone in heavy upright sleep. It wasn't hard. My own breath was coming nearly that labored anyway, from tension.

He was good with knobs and hinges and things. I never heard the door open and this one, unlike the one downstairs, was right behind me. A little eddy of air puffed through the dark at me. I could feel it because my scalp, the real one, was all wet at the roots of the hair right then.

If it was going to be a knife or head-blow the dodge might give me a second chance, that was the most I could hope for, I knew. My arms and shoulders are hefty. I'd bring him down on me in a bear-hug after the first slash or drive, and break his neck or collarbone against me.

If it was going to be a gun he'd get me anyway in the end. A difference of a few seconds. He had a gun, I knew, that he was going to use on me in the open, over at Lakeside Park. I was hoping that here, indoors, in order to make his own escape more practicably—

Time was up.

The flash of the shot lit up the room for a second, it was so dark. Or at least the corners of it, like flickering, weak lightning. The bust bounced on my shoulder and disintegrated into chunks.

I thought he was jumping up and down on the floor for a minute with frustrated rage. Then when I saw him dart by me and lean over the window-sill to look for a way out the sound transferred itself rearwards and downwards, became a pummeling with hoof and hip at the street-door. The camera-finish after all. But he still could have killed me five times.

I flung my body down into the narrow crevice between chair-arm and wall but my legs were still up and so was my head and that one shoulder.

He whirled, fired at me so close that it was like looking a sunrise in the face. I didn't feel it, so—it hadn't hit.

"You—" I heard him grunt to himself. I think it was the last thing he said. The rest of his life was all action, not verbal.

He flung over the sill on one arm and dropped into the yard. Two-story drop. He made it because he missed the cement, landed on the sod-strip in the middle. I jacked myself up over the chair-arm and flung myself bodily forward at the window, nearly hitting it chin-first.

He went all right. When life depends on it you go. He took the first fence, rolled over that bellywards. He went over the second like a cat, hands and feet pointed together in a spring. Then he was back in the rear yard of his own building. He got up on something, just about like Sam had—

The rest was all footwork, with quick little corkscrew-twists at each landing-stage. Sam had latched his windows down when he was over there but *he'd* reopened one of them for ventilation on his return. His whole life depended now on that casual, unthinking little act—

Second, third. He was up to his own windows. He'd made it. Something went wrong. He veered out away from them in another pretzel-twist, flashed up toward the fifth, the one above. Something sparked in the darkness of one of his own windows where he'd been just now and a shot thudded heavily out around the quadrangle-enclosure like a big bass drum.

He passed the fifth, the sixth, got up to the roof. He'd made it a second time. Gee, he loved life! The guys in his own windows couldn't get him, he was over them in a straight line and there was too much fire escape interlacing in the way.

I was too busy watching him to watch what was going on around me. Suddenly Boyne was next to

me, sighting. I heard him mutter, "I almost hate to do this, he's got to fall so far."

He was balanced on the roof parapet up there with a star right over his head. An unlucky star. He stayed a minute too long, trying to kill before he was killed. Or maybe he was killed and knew it.

A shot cracked, high up against the sky, the window pane flew apart all over the two of us and one of the books snapped right behind me.

Boyne didn't say anything more about hating to do it. My face was pressing outward against his arm. The recoil of his elbow jarred my teeth. I blew a clearing through the smoke to watch him go.

It was pretty horrible. He took a minute to show anything, standing up there on the parapet. Then he let his gun go, as if to say, "I won't need this any more." Then he went after it. He missed the fire escape entirely, came all the way down on the outside. He landed so far out he hit one of the projecting planks, down there out of sight. It bounced his body up, like a springboard. Then it landed again—for good. And that was all.

I said to Boyne: "I got it. I got it finally. The fifth-floor flat, the one over his, that they're still working on. The cement kitchen-floor, raised above the level of the other rooms. They wanted to comply with the fire laws and also obtain a dropped living-room effect as cheaply as possible. Dig it up—"

He went right over then and there, down through the basement and over the fences, to save time. The electricity wasn't turned on yet in that one, they had to use their torches. It didn't take them long at that, once they'd got started. In about half an hour he came to the window and wigwagged over for my benefit. It meant yes.

He didn't come over until nearly eight in the morning, after they'd tidied up and taken them away. Both away, the hot dead and the cold dead. He said, "Jeff, I take it all back. That damn fool that I sent up there about the trunk—well, it wasn't his fault, in a way. I'm to blame.

"He didn't have orders to check on the woman's description, only on the contents of the trunk. He came back and touched on it in a general way. I go home and I'm in bed already, and suddenly pop! into my brain—one of the tenants I questioned two whole days ago had given us a few details and they didn't tally with his on several important points. Talk about being slow to catch on!"

"I've had that all the way through this damn thing," I admitted ruefully. "I call it delayed action. It nearly killed me."

"I'm a police officer and you're not."

"That how you happened to shine at the right time?"

"Sure, we came over to pick him up for questioning. I left them planted there when we saw he wasn't in and came on over here by myself to square it up with you while we were waiting. How did

you happen to hit on that cement floor?"

I told him about the freak synchronization. "The renting agent showed up taller at the kitchen window in proportion to Thorwald, than he had been a moment before when both were at the living-room windows together. It was no secret that they were putting in cement floors, topped by a cork composition, and raising them considerable. But it took on new meaning. Since the top floor one has been finished for some time, it had to be the fifth. Here's the way I have it lined up, just in theory. She's been in ill health for years and he's been out of work, and he got sick of that and of her both—"

"She'll be here later today, they're bringing her down under arrest."

"He probably insured her for all he could get and then started to poison her slowly, trying not to leave any trace. I imagine—and remember this is pure conjecture—she caught him at it that night the light was up all night. Caught on in some way or caught him in the act. He lost his head, and did the very thing he had wanted all along to avoid doing. Killed her by violence—strangulation or a blow. The rest had to be hastily improvised.

"He got a better break than he deserved at that. He thought of the apartment upstairs, went up and looked around. They'd just finished laying the floor, the cement hadn't hardened yet and the materials were still around. He gouged a trough out of it just wide enough to take her body, put her in it, mixed fresh cement and recemented over her, possibly raising the general level of the flooring an inch or two so that she'd be safely covered. A permanent odorless coffin.

"Next day the workmen came back, laid down the cork surfacing on top of it without noticing anything. I suppose he'd used one of their own trowels to smooth it. Then he sent his accessory upstate fast, near where his wife had been several summers before but to a different farmhouse where she wouldn't be recognized, along with the trunk keys. Sent the trunk up after her and dropped himself an already-used postcard into his mailbox with the year-date blurred.

"In a week or two she would have probably committed 'suicide' up there as Mrs. Anna Thorwald. Despondency due to ill health. Written him a farewell note and left her clothes beside some body of deep water. It was risky but they might have succeeded in collecting the insurance at that."

By nine Boyne and the rest had gone. I was still sitting there in the chair, too keyed up to sleep. Sam came in and said, "Here's Doc Preston."

He showed up rubbing his hands, in that way he has. "Guess we can take that cast off your leg now. You must be tired of sitting there all day doing nothing."

I just gave him a look.

murder on san afer

by . . . Hayden Howard

Merad was alone on the island with his partner's killer—and the killer had found the gun.

JOHN MERAD stood clutching his hat. He muttered, "It cannot be—when I look again I will see he is a young ram."

For the croaking of the ravens, whose covetous spirals had beckoned him over the dunes, was no different than if his partner, young Paul de la Cruz, had been a sheep butchered. And the sky was the immortal blue of yesterday when they had waded for abalones, shouting with life as the cold Pacific swept their thighs.

The same long groundswell boomed against the cliffs. Surely the eyes lied—surely nothing had happened. The earthquake-rhythm of ocean against island was undiminished, imperturbable as the heartbeat of God.

His lips moving, John Merad crossed himself.

On the island of San Afer there were five thousand sheep, three water tanks, two salt-whitened cabins, two shearing sheds, one shrill-voiced black-and-tan border collie, a fluttering of mocking birds, the myriad footprints of white-footmice, the occasional green glare of a fox's eyes along the night trail to the privy, the gulls, the ravens and Paul de la Cruz and John

Once upon a time—not so many years ago, in fact—murder in fiction was inextricably tangled with high life—from the Belgravia of Sherlock Holmes to the Park Avenue of Philo Vance. Nowadays it occurs, like gold, wherever the author finds it, even on a California islet devoted to sheep-raising. As in this powerful new story.

Merad. But someone had murdered Paul de la Cruz.

Last night I had no dream, he thought. *I can't have done it in my sleep. There is no blood on me, not even under my fingernails. I have not walked in the course of a dream for at least a week, only twice since Paul moved to the other cabin. And the planks inside my window and door, when I woke they were as I had nailed them. At the sound in the night of me prying the crowbar under the planks, Basta would have barked and whined outside and waked me. I could not get out and walk asleep while the door and window were nailed and the dog on guard.*

The sheepdog began to whine again.

This morning, waking naturally, he had pried off the planks to her shrill accompaniment to find her tied outside the door, which meant Paul de la Cruz had gone roaming before dawn. When a suspicious sound, the puffing of a boat's exhaust or the injured bleating of a ewe came to Paul, he would rise and go, the anxious shepherd, into the darkness, leaving Basta tied so she could not follow, so she would whine if necessary to waken John Merad from the nocturnal vagaries of his dreams. For once Paul had found him groping on the brink of the cliff.

"Basta! Be quiet! *Enough!*" John Merad spoke to the dog without looking at her. He examined his hands again and shook his head. Then he walked in a circle on the dune. The wind had blurred Paul's tracks as well as the running set that paralleled them. John Merad could see the mark of Paul's knee where he had tripped and rolled. The other had fallen too in his effort to stop quickly, then had leapt upon Paul.

The weapon had been something as heavy-edged, John Merad decided, as the great cleaver the boatman, Shaker, used to chop the backbones of the sharks he trolled for instead of steering directly to San Afer with their supplies. Paul de la Cruz and John Merad had complained against Shaker. And now that Mr. Patrick had fired the angry boatman it would have to be Patrick that John must tell of Paul's death.

Paul's collarbone had been shattered as from the blow of an ax. *An ax* — John Merad's thought boomed—*when I go to get the shovel I will have to look if there is blood on our ax.*

His jaw began to twitch with nervous apprehension. Crossing himself he tried his foot in the murderer's footprint but too much sand had drifted to tell much, though the murderer's print seemed the smaller. He backtracked, breathing unevenly, to where the tracks angled toward the sheep camp. But higher on the dune he gasped with relief. The backward running indentations veered sharply over the dunes toward the northwest ridge.

Strangely there were no sheep clustered about the upper water tank. John Merad paused, his gaze leaping uphill through scrub. Once

a weaving arm-waving silhouette had appeared up there with the wind carrying its hoarse song and laughter. The fisherman had plunged his head and shoulders into the tank before Paul's shots frightened him off and the sheep, who fled deer-like, had refused to drink there for three days.

John Merad raced upward through wool-tufted chaparral until he stood on the backbone of the island. Below him now was the Northwest Cove. But the high cliffs enclosing it prevented him from seeing more than a shadowy glint of the entry channel.

There must be a fishing boat down there, he thought. One of the rock-cod fishermen had got drunk and come ashore and when Paul went down to tell him to get off the crazy fisherman had chased him up the trail and over the ridge and killed him.

John Merad ducked back on his side of the ridge and ran toward the camp to get the rifle. By the time he reached the ridge again his lungs and legs burned so powerfully he had to lie down. The front sight of the rifle danced in a pattern of yellow lights as he lay gasping beside the dog.

I should have tied you, he thought. *But it is good not to be alone. I must not lie here too long. Even now the murderer may be pushing off his skiff or raising his anchor. But I must lie long enough so that my breath will be even, so I will hold the rifle steady. But wait, surely I cannot shoot him. I have got to use my head in this, capture him, turn him over to the police. I will lock him in the shed until Mr. Patrick's tug comes. This is Thursday—Saturday he will come . . .*

"It is better this way, Paul," he murmured, "two wrongs do not make a right."

Cautiously he worked down through the gray-green brush to the edge of the cliff. There was no boat.

The dog and he ran down the trail to the quiet edge of the water. The tide was lapping in. John Merad's forehead wrinkled at the surging sea.

"What shall I do? It will cover the landing marks of his skiff. There will be no evidence."

But the tide had already covered them or there had been no landing marks and John Merad squatted down with the rifle between his knees and Basta whining at his feet.

He did not use his head, he decided. From there it was too long a run up the cliff and over the ridge. A man would be overtaken in the first sprint up the path if the murderer were quick, somewhere on the upper slope if the murderer were slow but of great endurance. It was hardly possible they would be so evenly matched that the race would endure until Paul fell among the dunes clear over the southeast shore.

Perhaps the murderer was a maniac who had stalked Paul along the ridge. He might have landed between the bird rocks in the sanded-up bay at the west end of the

island. The time the tugboat broke its shaft and Mr. Patrick had told Shaker to rent a launch to bring their supplies the southeaster was breaking so hard against the loading pier that Shaker had to bring his little boat around the west end into the lee of the bird rocks. There he was able to pass over the bar into the bay on the very peak of the high-tide.

John Merad frowned as the picture of Shaker loomed in his memory of Shaker's apelike forearm thumping on the gunwale of the launch, his tiny head thrusting back and forth like a sandpiper's while his voice shrilled for them to hurry up and wade their crud ashore before the tide trapped him in there.

No one was there now, John Merad decided, because the tide was ebbing and the day's wind was westerly. The loading pier at Sheep Bay was the place to tie up. That's where he should have looked first.

He hurried back up the trail. He had to rest more often now. The sun was floating high and hot, dissolving the shadows beneath the manzanita. Something crashed away through the brush as he topped the ridge. A stray sheep?

"Basta," he whispered. "What is wrong? There is a stranger on our island. Why don't you bark?"

Far-off through the shimmering heat on the golden-dry wild oats, wide grey-white patches of sheep drifted. He watched for a moment to be certain nothing was frightening them or influencing the direction of their flow. The murderer might well have come to kill sheep.

In the old days the bootleggers had slaughtered herds, dogs, and shepherds with tommy-guns. Nowadays fishermen would quietly run down a young lamb and cut its throat. Paul de la Cruz had fired a rifle at more than one hull-down-for-the-horizon lobster boat.

The chaparral dispersed where the wind had blown sand up the slope. Over the dunes, as John Merad crossed in the general direction of the loading pier, the wind carried the squabbling voices of the ravens. There were none in the sky now.

"What's the matter with me? I've got to bury Paul right away." He turned and slogged west through the sand, pausing once to extricate a barrel stave, a relic of whaling days. He used it for a shovel, afterwards stamped it in two and bound it in the shape of a cross with the strips of his red bandana so that Mr. Patrick and he would be able to find the temporary grave again.

Could the murderer be watching him from the ridge? He wondered. If he had used his head he would have brought the binoculars. Probably the killer had only an ax, not a gun like John Merad. If he had a gun he would already be firing at him while John was out in the open, completely exposed.

Merad turned his back on the ridge and started for the pier again. The sun was behind him, descending into the west. His tongue felt big in his mouth. When Basta

whined suddenly, he whirled but there was no one to be seen.

"Basta, *enough*—be quiet."

He advanced cautiously onto the pier because at the end there was a box a man could lie behind in ambush. No one was there. Neither on the end of the pier nor on the side pilings did he find recent paint marks of a boat. He walked back shaking his head.

The gulley that opened at the foot of the pier branched into a shaded trail through the cliff to the camp but this was too good a spot for ambush, so he scaled the cliff at a place he knew and crept up to the sheds from behind. They were empty. He kicked in the door of Paul's cabin. Empty. At his own cabin he peered between the window planks but thanks to the interior shadows he could not decide whether someone was hunched in the far corner or not.

He wanted to shout bravely, "Come out, you murderer, or I'll shoot." But the camp was so quiet he could not bring himself to do it. His tongue kept sticking to the roof of his mouth. As he edged around the corner of his cabin he realized that kicking in the door would be a mistake. He would be looking from light into darkness, giving the advantage to the inside man. Worse, the corner where the murderer was hunched would be invisible unless he stepped well into the room and whirled to his left.

I've got to use my head on this, he thought. "Here, Basta!"

He caught the dog by the collar and, inching the door open with the side of his foot, thrust her nose inside. She struggled backward, whining. Someone was in there all right. He considered setting the cabin afire. But all his belongings were inside. The cabin was Mr. Patrick's property, not his to burn.

Backing off step by step he retreated to the shed.

Clumsily carrying a stepladder with a rifle, he came forward again and rested it against the side of the cabin. Under the roof was a small ventilation window. Through this opening he plunged rifle, head and shoulders. To his dismay the man-shaped object in the corner was his extra blankets with his leather jacket folded on top.

The ladder, unbalanced by the forward movement of his torso, fell sideways, leaving him hanging by his armpits with the back of his head braced against the top of the window. For a moment he considered wriggling forward through the window and onto the long beam which tied together the two shorter sides of the rectangular cabin.

He could drop the rifle on the bed, then hang and drop himself. He knew the beam was strong enough because when he and Paul de la Cruz had bunked together Paul enjoyed chinning himself and playing "monkey-man" on it.

But his awkwardly scraping foot located a nail on the outside wall and he managed to adjust his position so that he could lower himself backward without giving up the rifle. He dropped with a startled

grunt, pitching from his heels to the base of his spine, rolled quickly, aiming the rifle in the direction of the sheds.

Something moved all right. But it could have been the rags hanging on the back wall of the shed. He walked into its shade and after looking about plunged the dipper into the water barrel and drank with convulsive gulps that dribbled cold water over his chin and down his chest. He poured water for Basta, then squinted at the reddening sun.

"I will feed you a little now so that you will be wide awake, yet not too restless, when it gets dark." He poured the hard pellets of her prepared food like hail into her pan and set her five-pound sack back in the tin where the mice wouldn't get it. "Basta, you must be on guard tonight because if I am killed there will be no one to feed you tomorrow."

The dog knew she was being addressed and whined and wriggled her hindquarters. Then she followed John Merad into his cabin and watched him fry his evening meal. He tossed her a slice of bacon. "Watch carefully, Basta. It is in the dark that honest men are killed."

With food in his belly he felt more confident.

Using his head, he thought, he would say it was not enough to hide from this man. He must kill or capture him and in the dark the man who waited had the advantage over the one who moved and made noises.

If he was a maniac he'd be baited like a fish.

Basta watched with cocked head while John Merad rolled his extra blankets into the shape of a man and laid them on his bunk. A kettle and a dark sweater became the head. He placed the lantern so the bed was in shadow.

I have forgotten something, he thought. But he could not think what it was and gently closed the door and walked to the shed. He lay down with its wall to his back and Basta's collar gripped in his left hand.

The moon had already surmounted the Coast Range on the mainland. As it rose the shadow of the shed retracted toward Merad.

He heard a fox catch a mouse but did not take his eyes from the brush patch adjoining the dimly glowing window. It was from this direction that a cautious murderer would approach the cabin.

Motionless he listened to the ocean pulsing about the island. The tide had gone high again, the lower-high. At the west end of San Afer he pictured the crests of the seas, hissing onto the sand bar, herding the moonlight-feeding sandpipers before them. But until the morning's higher-high tide a boat would have to wait.

With the machine-reflex of a dead frog touched by an electric wire his muscles clenched, his throat squeaked air. He knew what he had forgotten.

He never did look at the ax. The

ax must have been standing right there in the corner of the cabin, yet he did not look at it. Why didn't he look at the ax? What was the matter with him? Suppose Paul's blood was on the ax?

Desperately he decided—but blood on the ax was impossible. There was no way for him to have pried the planks off the cabin door without Basta waking him. So surely he would remember whether he took the ax out of the cabin. He did not even look at it when he woke that morning. It was impossible.

But what if the ax was *not* in the cabin when he ate his supper? Since he did not look at the ax, how did he know it was there?

Clutching the rifle, he thought, *I should go see whether the ax is in there. I should see if it has been moved.*

But if he approached the cabin, and someone else had crept close and was watching, that one could ambush him. He had to use his head. He ought to wait for the killer to make the move. At least he ought to wait until the sun rose before he went to look at the ax.

Basta tried to crawl away but John held her fast. The moon was directly overhead now. Merad tried to estimate how many hours it would be before its glow was in his face, the concealing shadows driven from his shed.

If he had used his head, he thought, he would have blackened his face with mud.

He could hear the furtive hoofs of sheep, a crackling of the scrub, a cautious bleat and the rumbling of stomachs as the flock drifted with the west wind toward the cabin. They sounded restless but unafraid, drifting with the moonlight.

Gently the ocean drummed through the earth into his body. It rolled and sighed through the endless night.

The distant whining of Basta awakened him. A loud thump remained like an echo in his mind while he blinked at the lantern flame. The bottoms of his feet stung as though he had dropped from a considerable height, from the beam perhaps. He was trembling with the remnants of a violent yet mysteriously forgotten emotion. Somehow he had been tricked and was no longer at ambush in the shed.

Blankly he stared at the shape on the bed. A thrill of terror passed up his spine as he realized he no longer held the rifle. There was only a heavily unbalanced stick in his hand. Outside the cabin door he could hear Basta whining as he raised the thing his hand clutched toward the lantern.

Quickly and more quickly breathing, he stared at the ax-head. It gleamed clean and sharp in the lantern light.

Great tears blurred his eyes. He was smiling. "I didn't kill him, there is no blood on the ax," he breathed.

Outside the cabin door the dog began to growl.

John Merad stood there by the

lantern, wondering where the rifle was. Since he must have dropped inside through the little window above the beam, he thought, he had probably left the rifle leaning against that side of the cabin.

He stepped toward the doorway as Basta's voice exploded in angrily barking, yammering forward-charging cries. He flung back the door to see the dog like a dappled shadow, streaking toward the shed. The man stepped into the moonlight. Moonbeams blinking on the barrel of the rifle, orange flashes at its muzzle, the man fired three times, deafeningly, as fast as he could work the bolt. Then the dog was at his throat, bowling him backward into the darkness.

Charging with the ax after the dog, John Merad knew who the man was. A voice shrieked, the rifle boomed and something zipped through the air. But Merad ran straight through the moonlight. If Shaker could not hit anything with a rifle in the daytime, he doubted he would hit anything in the dark —and there was only one bullet left.

Burning Merad's hip, the rifle exploded with echoes under the shed. Like a dancer he stamped on Shaker's wrist before the walking hand could find the dark-edged fish-cleaver and felt the bones crush.

He shifted his weight to kick Shaker's face but did not do it. He pulled Basta away from the man's seemingly frozen leg and pushed her away. "Enough, Basta, enough—it is over."

"Oh God!" the man called Shaker cried, suddenly drawing up his leg with a clashing and ringing of broken glass.

As John Merad, who knew he was the stronger, strong as ten men, started to help Shaker up his hand felt the dampness of the man's hip. He thrust his hand into the moonlight; it was not blood. He smelled his palm. It was not liquor—it had a bitter tooth-gritting acid stench.

"I'm dying," Shaper groaned.

John thought about that as he led the uncontrollably twitching boatman into the cabin.

"I think you have to drink it," he said. "Getting it in cuts probably won't kill you." He moved the lantern toward the contorted face.

"Before dawn when the tide was high you landed across the sandbar by the bird rocks and walked along the ridge to the water tank. Paul found you there. He was unarmed, so you chased him and murdered him. But you hid from me because I had the rifle." He shoved the lantern closer. "Did you poison the sheep?

"You came to poison the sheep," Merad shouted in Shaker's face. "Did you pour it in the tank?"

"No, I didn't—I didn't—I *didn't!*" Shaker screamed, his face ghastly. "From the ridge I saw you coming with the rifle and got away from the tanks into the brush so you wouldn't shoot me. I swear the full bottle broke on my leg."

John Merad hastily tied him, spread-eagled, on the bed.

"You got to help me back to the bay," Shaker pleaded. "We got to get the launch over the bar on the morning tide. I can feel the poison burning up my leg. I'm dying, I tell you."

"We'll wait and see," John Merad replied thoughtfully and hurried into the night to drive his sheep away from the tanks.

I will keep them away until daylight, he thought. Then I will be able to make sure none are dead or appear sick. If there is something wrong with any of them I will taste the water of the three tanks and perhaps I will be able to tell which are pure so they may drink. If I cannot decide I will permit one barren ewe to go to each tank and watch them afterward. It is lucky the tanks are close together.

The shepherd ran breathlessly along the ridge with Basta ranging ahead.

When the sun pushed above the dark mountains of the mainland the murderer was dead but he had not lied. For John Merad lay down and slept among his drinking sheep.

In response to an overwhelming number of requests for complete bibliography on the SAINT, we are listing below all SAINT volumes published to date, arranged in order of sequence instead of according to date of publication. Original titles are in parenthesis. Here goes—

The Saint Meets The Tiger (Meet The Tiger)
Enter The Saint
The Saint Closes The Case (The Last Hero)
The Avenging Saint (Knight Templar)
Featuring The Saint
Alias The Saint
The Saint Meets His Match (She Was A Lady)
The Saint Versus Scotland Yard (The Holy Terror)
The Saint's Getaway (Getaway)
The Saint And Mr. Teal (Once More The Saint)
The Brighter Buccaneer
The Saint In London (The Misfortunes Of Mr. Teal)
The Saint Intervenes (Boodle)
The Saint Goes On
The Saint In New York
Saint Overboard
The Ace of Knaves
The Saint Bids Diamonds (Thieves' Picnic)
The Saint Plays With Fire (Prelude For War)
Follow The Saint
The Happy Highwayman
The Saint In Miami
The Saint Goes West
The Saint Steps In
The Saint On Guard
The Saint Sees It Through
Call For The Saint
Saint Errant
The First Saint Omnibus
The Second Saint Omnibus

Of course, to keep up with the newest adventures of the SAINT, all you have to do is to follow him in each issue of THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE.

the doting burglar

by . . . Ben Hecht

A burglar's lot is not a 'appy one—especially when a chilly world fails to understand him.

JOHN," she said, "do be careful. You don't know how I worry about you. I sit and think and think and tremble."

John looked at his sensitive wife and smiled. He was a young burglar, a handsome burglar. He drew himself up proudly to his full height and gazed down upon the pretty pleading woman who sat knitting by the window of their snug cottage.

"Sarah," he said, "don't be foolish. You don't imagine for a moment that I—good Lord! You don't think that any kidney-footed red-necked cop is going to nail me! *Why!*"

With a derisive laugh John Heliotrope strode to his wife's side and patted her shoulders good-naturedly. "I should think," he said, "you'd know better by this time than to worry about me."

A look of admiration and love came into his wife's eyes. "I can't help it," she whispered. "You know how I love you. And you never tell me anything, *anything*. John, don't go out to-night—please!"

John shook his head, still smiling. "How about a little necklace," he whispered, "and a pair of pearl earrings, eh? I haven't forgotten tomorrow's your birthday, darling."

We introduced Ben Hecht a few issues back with a stingingly taut life-and-death story called MIRACLE OF THE FIFTEEN MURDERERS—and with due mention in this space of this author's amazing versatility over the years. A comparison of that tale with this one offers further proof of Mr. Hecht's redoubtable catholicism. For while the dangers that threaten John Heliotrope, the happy housebreaker, surely are sufficiently menacing, yet their effect on the reader is one of sheer farce.

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A soft throaty laugh was his reward. "You dear foolish," his wife murmured. She arose and embraced him fondly.

"You won't ever forget my birthday, John. If you should I'd think—I'd think that you had forgotten something else." She looked wistfully into his eyes.

"I won't," he promised, "and besides I've been rather lazy lately. It's been almost a week and I don't want to turn into a bum."

Mrs. Heliotrope laughed again. "You needn't make any more excuses, John. I never have stood in your way, have I? And if you bring me back a nice necklace or earrings or something, why—I'll forgive your going away from me like this and leaving me all alone, you naughty boy."

"Don't worry about that," said the burglar, a humorous ring in his voice. "Tonight I work for *you*. I'll pick out something extra fine—something you can be proud of and wear to the theater."

"Do, John. That sealskin coat you brought home last week is four sizes too small for me. Why, it's a little girl's coat!"

"I know, Sarah," he answered. "I couldn't help it. I never was much of a hand for picking out women's clothes. Before we were married I never gave them a thought."

"Well, it's time you learned. If you should run across anything size sixteen, or even a seventeen, don't forget. But for Heaven's sake don't bring back one of those old-fashioned sealskin jackets like you did last month. They're for grandmothers."

John Heliotrope smiled and, after another kiss, darted up the stairs into his room, crying, "I'll be back in a minute."

Before a bureau in his room the burglar paused. From it he selected two finely edged instruments, one like a delicate cold chisel, the other a curious auger. Then, donning a pair of light kid gloves, he seized his slouch hat and issued into the upper hall.

His wife's room stood open before him. After a moment's hesitation he entered it and an exclamation of anger escaped him. The door of the wall safe stood ajar. He approached it quickly and, kneeling before it, drew forth two red-leather cases.

He opened them and stared curiously at an assortment of jewelry, a pearl necklace, rings, pendants, earrings, lorgnettes, collars, chains, watches. They were still dangerous loot. It would be another month before it would be cool enough to convert into liquid assets.

Closing the smoothly-swinging steel door he twirled the knob and locked the safe. "Sarah!" he exclaimed, as he appeared in the sitting-room downstairs. "You shouldn't leave your safe open like that. It's dangerous."

"Why, John—I didn't know." She stammered and looked at him appealingly. "Forgive me, please."

"I hate carelessness," he muttered and then, with a smile, came to her side and took her in his arms. "It's all right now, darling. I've locked it and everything is safe inside. Don't

wait up for me. Go to bed and have a good sleep. I'll be back at dawn."

Smiling and tearful Mrs. Heliotrope watched her knight fare forth and a great love and admiration welled in her heart at the sight of his stalwart figure moving into the darkness.

John Heliotrope swung down the street calmly and blithely, with the air of a man sure of himself and proud of his achievements. He was in a high mood for adventure. The spring night quickened his blood and he stepped briskly on, drawing in long breaths of the tree-smelling dark. Before a garage he stopped and, after a few moments' jesting with the owner, piloted his car dexterously out of the interior.

As he whirled down the street in his rakish sport model John Heliotrope meditated sweetly upon life. He thought for a moment upon his wife and tenderly imagined his return at dawn, laden with gifts—visualized her joy, her kisses, her gratitude.

She had invited a number of friends for her birthday party. There would be meat and drink and laughter. As he pondered upon these things Heliotrope drew from an inside pocket a notebook. There were certain addresses and notations inscribed therein. His memory refreshed, he started off again and was soon rolling down a stretch of dimly-lighted avenue, on each side of which loomed elegant homes.

He lessened the speed of his car and with a keen eye upon these houses progressed more slowly down the road. In front of one, almost concealed in its own darkness, he came to a stop. At this point his entire demeanor changed. The dreaminess and nonchalance were gone. He stepped out nimbly, walked directly into the darkness engulfing the house and with a sharp glance about him proceeded at once to his business.

Twenty minutes later he returned, leaped into his car and drove off. A puzzled light was in his eyes and a look of indignation. He twisted the wheel viciously in turning a corner and seemed altogether out of sorts.

"Of all the damned nuisances!" he kept muttering to himself. Failure had befallen him. Double-barred windows, triple-bolted doors, unusually protected porch screens had resisted his sinister advances. At every turn he had been met by some newfangled burglar-proof contrivance. As he pondered upon his fruitless labors of the twenty minutes a rage slowly possessed him.

His next call was at the curb of a brightly-lighted corner. Again leaving his car, its engine running, he penetrated a polite wilderness of trees and shrubs, achieved a point directly under a masonry porch and, with an agility purely Darwinian, mounted one of the stone pillars.

Arrived on the porch he brushed his trousers and fell to work upon the French doors confronting him. An exclamation of joy escaped him as the doors yielded under his skilful fingers. John Heliotrope found himself inside a large heavily-carpeted

room. With a small flash he lighted up little circles of this room and progressed to other fields.

It was barely ten minutes later that a shot startled the neighborhood and John Heliotrope dropped courageously from the cement porch to the soft earth below to flee with great haste toward his car. Behind him came a man dressed in a white nightgown and flourishing a long revolver.

The man, however, stopped at the edge of the porch and emptied his weapon into the darkness. Leaping into his car the burglar started off at full speed, bent low over the wheel and cursing outrageously as he flew through the night.

To follow John Heliotrope in his further nocturnal adventures would be merely to record a series of heartbreaking episodes, fruitless and idle performances in which the vaunted skill, courage and penetration of this artful creature all came to naught.

Fate seemed utterly opposed. Fortune's lips seemed entirely disinclined to smile.

With the first dim light of dawn breaking over the streets John Heliotrope sprang into his car, emitted a final round oath and dashed off. For the sixth time he had been foiled. His plans, matured during a week of study and observation, had for the sixth time encountered the unforeseen—in this instance a kennel of dogs, fierce, exultant, morocco-lunged.

Behind him, as he sped empty-handed down the road resounded the shots and shouts of outraged citizenry. Through the quiet, faintly lighted streets the chase led. Bullets whistled by John's ears, thudded against the back of his machine. With a gasp of joy he heard the noise of the pursuer growing less, turned for an instant, perceived it a mere dot in the distant road. He was safe.

He turned off at a right angle and drove on at diminished speed. There came to him a sudden realization of his complete failure. It was too late to try again and in any case to try an uncharted house was madness.

He drove on, thinking now of his wife, of her party, of her disappointment. Home and bed called him. The night had been tedious, dangerous. He felt weary.

In the block where he lived his chagrin came back to him with increased violence. He frowned ominously upon the innocent homes of his neighbors but a sense of fatality kept him in his seat. His own house was dark. No doubt Sarah was asleep, dreaming of necklaces and earrings, he reflected bitterly.

Passing on, he proceeded to the garage, stored his machine in a dispirited manner and returned on foot to the cottage which he called home. As he walked certain ideas coursed through his brain and a certain determination brought a glint into his eyes.

He approached the cottage cautiously. There were obstacles, fearful obstacles. First there was the complete and elaborate system of burglar alarms which he himself had

had installed against just such inroads. He had pointed out to his wife that the valuables with which the cottage was laden made it a rich target for other practitioners of his profession.

Consequently, thanks to bringing his inside information to bear upon the business, not a window was without its silver strips, not a door without its bells and other alarm devices. He had taken steps even to insure the basement approaches against marauders. The windows on the second floor, the skylight on the roof, all were equipped with these satanic gadgets.

He paused before his home and for the seventh time that night swore roundly. He racked his mind, trying to remember a single vulnerable point he might have overlooked in his outfitting. There was none.

Were he to pry open any window in the house it would ring and jangle—any door it would bark and shriek—any brick it would cry out his presence to the neighborhood and to his wife. Twice he circled the cottage, gazing upon all points of ingress, weighing his chances, and twice he returned to his starting-point, desperate and angered.

The chimney! The thought came to him with a clear joyous bounce. The chimney had been overlooked. It was a broad Santa-Claus chimney, leading into a great fireplace which had not been used for several weeks.

In ten minutes he had gained the roof. In another five he had started down this inspiration of a chimney. An inconceivable blackness assailed him. His ears became clogged, his eyes laden, his mouth full, his hands heavy with soot.

At last, however, his feet touched bottom. He wedged his head out and stood in the sitting-room of his home, dripping with ashes and chimney refuse. Brushing himself quickly over the empty grate he tiptoed out of the room, up the stairs and into the corridor on which his wife's chamber opened.

He tried the door. It was locked. Again his previous caution mocked him. Not a door in the house but had experienced his cunning locksmanship. No two-tumbler bolt this, but an intricate Yale, doubly secured.

For another ten minutes he worked on it with no success. The dawn had come and the air was beginning to shine with the sun. Casting his eyes frenziedly about, he encountered a glistening object on the floor, a key. He picked it up quickly and recognized it at once.

"The careless little idiot!" he murmured professionally.

He fitted it into the lock and the door opened noiselessly. Asleep in the bed lay his wife. He gazed upon her composed features and a fearful hesitation came into his heart—such a cowardice as he had never before experienced in his labors.

His tread was pantherlike, his eye furtive and filled with terror. Slowly he made his way to the wall safe. Slowly and with infinite patience he turned the knob, listened to the click of the tumblers. It

opened. Before him lay two red-leather cases on a shelf.

Opening one of them he extracted a great pearl necklace, a pendant of rubies, two rings laden with diamonds, then replaced the case. He locked the safe, he tiptoed out, he locked the door, he tiptoed down the stairs after replacing the key on the floor. Once in the sitting-room he drew his first happy breath.

He opened the front door with his key and a great jangling and tumult filled the house. A moment later he heard his wife calling, "John, John, is it you?"

"Yes, darling," he cried back.

An apparition in lacy nightclothes descended the stairway and stood facing him. "Why, John, *look* at yourself! Where have you been? Heavens alive!"

His wife stared at him, her mouth open, a look of fright and amusement on her face. "John," she repeated, "what's happened?"

Through the caked soot he grinned at her and pulling from his pocket a pearl necklace, a pendant of rubies, a handful of rings and trinkets, held them aloft. A gurgle of delight came from her.

"Your birthday," said John. "My respects and gifts."

Opening wide her sleepy eyes Mrs. Heliotrope rushed toward him.

"Don't!" he warned. "You'll get all sooty. I've had a hell of a time. Quick, put them in the safe. Or no, *I'll* put them there—you're too careless about such matters.

The birthday party was a success. Resplendent in silks and jewels Mrs. Heliotrope sat facing her husband at the table, her guests smiling sympathetically at the devotion and gratitude which illumined the glances she cast upon her handsome husband.

It was not until a week later that John Heliotrope thought it safe, however, to summon the Anti-Burglar Protective Association and have an asbestos burglar alarm installed in the chimney of his home.

Unless you're the sort who is ever on the outside of the fence, peering mournfully over its top at the goings-on inside, you like to get in on a good thing. So if you have trouble finding your SAINT on your local newsstand (at 50c per copy), get in on our six-copy subscription offer by sending your check or money-order for $2.50 to KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. And if any of your mystery-minded friends are in the same boat, you might help them out by sending in a subscription check or money-order for them when gift time arrives.

In real life, crime detection has traveled a long road from the improvisations of Vidocq and Sir Robert Peel to the intricate laboratory techniques of the present-day F.B.I. Yet it is safe to say that fictional crime detection has at least kept pace with its more sordid prototype. Certainly it has come a long way from the ratiocinations of Poe's Dupin or Gaboriau's M. Lecoq.

In a number of modern mystery-story instances, murder methods have employed to the hilt the developments of twentieth-century science, up to and including poison gases and cancer-inducing radioactives. Criminality in such cases is proved, and the criminals brought before the bar of justice, by equally elaborate scientific devices.

Yet, as in real life revealed in almost any edition of almost any tabloid newspaper, the gun, the knife, the hands or the "blunt instrument" continue to be the weapons most generally favored by fictional killers. For while environments and gadgets may change with the passing decades, human motivations and behavior remain about as always. And surely, to be convincing, a fictional killer must be intensely human.

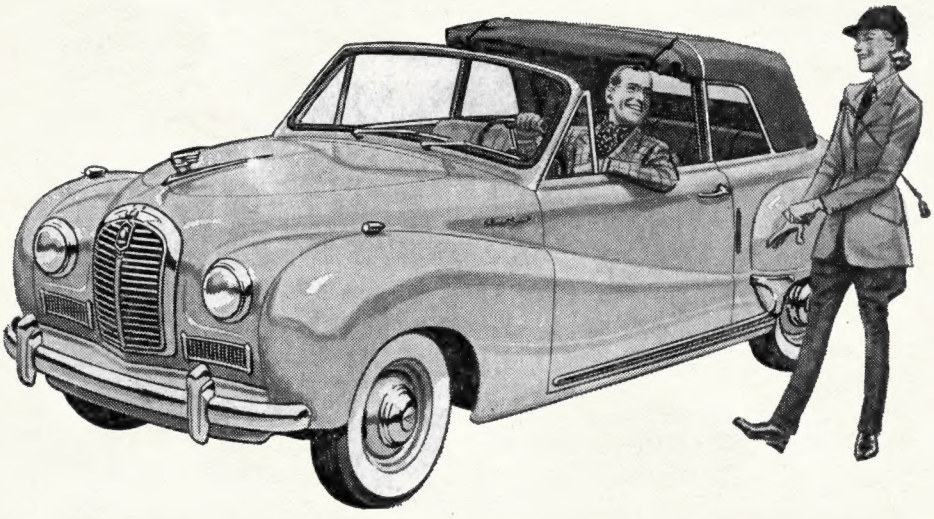
This same immutability is true of crime detection, whether in fact or in fable. Fingerprints may not lie—but witnesses always have and always will under proper provocation. Circumstantial evidence, no matter how damning or scientifically arrived at, will never convince a jury of a murderer's guilt as effectively as a confession forced from a suspect by a prosecutor's skillful questioning.

Let's face it—things may change but people don't. And people includes murderers. Which is why a truly good detective story, though written perhaps decades ago, is today more absorbing and rewarding than an inferior story written yesterday. Just as a good modern story is a whole lot better than a baser product of years gone by.

Old or new, a detective story is good or bad as its characters are believable or not. Which is the one and only thing we try to keep constantly in mind while engaged in selecting the stories for this magazine. We hope our choices continue to meet with your approval. If not, please let us know. For in the final analysis, it is your judgment by which we stand or fall.

—The Publisher.

Austin announces a new convertible



This new AUSTIN A-40 "Coupé de Ville" Convertible has a 3-position top that's truly continental. It cruises along at 65, cuts your operating expenses up to 50%, and delivers a good 35 miles per gallon! Underneath its smart exterior, you'll find a steel body that's extra tough. The price is the "pay off"! Only $1945 f.o.b. coastal port of entry including $250 worth of "free" extras and all Federal taxes.

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